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The new name of the National Osteoporosis Foundation

April 18, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin, Chair
The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito,

On behalf of our 13 national aging, health, family caregiver and bone health organizations, we are writing to request the Subcommittee's continued attention to the crisis in bone health and osteoporosis as you consider fiscal year 2025 appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services. As you know, one in two women and one in four men over the age of 50 will suffer a bone fracture in their lifetime due to the chronic disease osteoporosis. According to a 2021 Milliman report analyzing most recent (2016) claims data, 1.8 million Medicare beneficiaries, 70 percent of them women, suffered approximately 2.1 million osteoporotic fractures.

The breadth and scale of the impact of fractures tied to osteoporosis is stunning:

- 30% of those who suffer hip fractures die within a year.
- 42,000 patients institutionalized in nursing homes within three years.
- 23% of opioid-naïve hip fracture patients became chronic opioid users after surgery.
- Without reforms, total annual cost among Medicare beneficiaries will grow from \$57 billion in 2018 to over \$95 billion in 2040, as our population ages.

Our investments in research have given us the tools to reduce the rate of fractures and lower costs, the system many in the public are unaware of them and Medicare fails to utilize them:

- Only 20 percent of hip fracture patients receive medication proven to greatly reduce the risk of a second fracture. 95 percent of heart attack patients receive medication to prevent another heart attack.
- Only 8 percent (and only 5 percent of Black Americans) are even screened for osteoporosis within 6 months of a fracture.
- Few Medicare beneficiaries receive evidence-based post-fracture care demonstrated to reduce repeat fractures and costs.

While lowering the costs associated with many debilitating conditions requires additional research, new breakthrough treatments and/or expensive legislative mandates, this can be done for osteoporosis right now through simple administrative action. A broad coalition of

¹Milliman 2021, March. Medicare cost of osteoporotic fractures – 2021 updated report.

health professional and patient advocacy organizations has worked to develop, in consultation with CMS, a care coordination payment mechanism that assures beneficiaries who suffer an osteoporotic fracture get the evidence-based post-fracture care they need to help prevent a second fracture. CMS is considering this mechanism for inclusion in its 2025 Medicare physician payment updates. This is just the kind of action that President Biden called for in his March 18, [published statement](#) accompanying [Executive Order](#) on women's health research and innovation. They specifically highlighted osteoporosis as a critical women's health condition to be targeted for action. Specifically, the White House statement says that the President is directing the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to "identify ways to improve ... the clinical care that women receive" for diseases and conditions "...such as osteoporosis." The President added, "It is also the policy of my Administration to ensure that women have access to high-quality, evidence-based health care and to improve health outcomes for women across their lifespans and throughout the country."

We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee including report language on this in its FY24 report, but because CMS has not yet acted, we respectfully request the Subcommittee include language in its FY2025 report (specific language is attached) calling on CMS to promptly adopt changes to improve post-fracture care. Medicare has implemented similar payment reforms to improve outcomes in conditions like opioid use disorder and pain management.

We also need to substantially increase public and health professional awareness about bone health, osteoporosis and the falls that often precipitate osteoporotic fractures. Greater awareness about what people can do to improve their bone health through their lifetimes and reduce their risk of fractures and falls is essential to reducing the large and growing costs and human toll associated with osteoporosis. We greatly appreciate inclusion of continued funding for chronic disease education and awareness efforts. However, osteoporosis is by far the most prevalent and costly chronic disease that has not benefitted from CDC funding. ***We ask you to include \$1 million to develop and launch such an effort (specific language attached).***

For these action steps to be successful, they must be accessible to those at highest risk. As America is rapidly diversifying, social determinants of health, such as language and culture, must be prioritized when funding services and education campaigns. For example, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, whose numbers are expected to nearly triple by 2060, have the highest prevalence of osteoporosis (38.8% women, 6.5% men) yet studies have documented their lower use of medication, and among immigrants, poor knowledge about osteoporosis. Also, a recent study found that Black women with postmenopausal osteoporosis (PMO) had significantly higher rates of mortality, debility, and destitution after fracture than White women.¹ Limited knowledge of osteoporosis has also been observed in Black and Hispanic communities, further necessitating culturally and linguistically tailored messaging to the most vulnerable Americans.

Thank you so much for your attention to this very important and growing health crisis. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please contact Claire Gill, CEO of the

¹ Wright NC, Chen L, Saag KG, Brown CJ, Shikany JM, Curtis JR. Racial Disparities Exist in Outcomes After Major Fragility Fractures. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2020 Aug;68(8):1803-1810. doi: 10.1111/jgs.16455. Epub 2020 Apr 26. PMID: 32337717; PMCID: PMC793546

Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation at (703) 647-3025 or
cgill@bonehealthandosteoporosis.org.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention
Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation
Caregiver Action Network
Celiac Disease Foundation
Global Healthy Living Foundation
HealthyWomen
National Council on Aging
National Menopause Foundation
National Women's Health Network
Society for Women's Health Research
The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
The National Spine Health Foundation
Tigerlily Foundation

cc: The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Susan Collins, Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations

(Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Program Operations)

Reducing Osteoporotic Fractures. The Committee remains concerned that 1.8 million older Americans, 70 percent of them women, suffer 2.1 million bone fractures related to osteoporosis and that most are not getting the evidence based post fracture care proven to reduce costly secondary fractures. The Committee included language about this in its FY24 report and notes that taking prompt action to create a coordinated care payment mechanism for post osteoporotic fracture care would align with the directives of the President's March 18th Executive Order on Women's Health Research and Innovation that specifically calls out osteoporosis as a condition to be targeted for improved care by HHS. Evidence-based post-fracture care has been shown to reduce the rates of costly secondary fractures through improved screening, treatment initiation and adherence, patient and caregiver education and counseling, and comprehensive falls prevention strategies.

Background:

Up to 2.1 million osteoporotic bone fractures were suffered by approximately 1.8 million Medicare beneficiaries in 2016. That is more than the number of heart attacks, strokes or new breast cancer cases. The total annual cost for osteoporotic fractures among Medicare beneficiaries was \$57 billion in 2018 and without reforms is expected to grow to over \$95 billion in 2040, as our population ages. Too many Medicare beneficiaries who suffer an osteoporotic fracture are not getting the follow-up care been proven to reduce subsequent fractures because Medicare payment codes do not incentivize its use. Leading health systems have successfully employed models of coordinated post-fracture care and successfully reduced the rate of secondary (repeat) fractures and lowered costs. These secondary fracture prevention models (sometimes called fracture liaison service) have been in operation for more than 15 years in leading health systems in the U.S. and in countries around the world. A [demonstration by the VA](#) also found this coordinated post-fracture care improved care and reduced fractures and costs. These models are typically headed by a nurse coordinator who utilizes established protocols to ensure that individuals who suffer a fracture are identified and a care plan is established and implemented to assure receipt of appropriate screening, treatment and patient and caregiver education and counseling. Many models have incorporated a pharmacist in the care coordination team to enable prompt resolution of patient concerns related to prescribed medications and improved medication adherence. A population registry of fracture patients is typically established as well as a process and timeline for patient assessment and follow-up care. In addition to managing osteoporosis, where appropriate, these programs will refer patients to fall prevention services.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of model post-fracture care. For example, Kaiser Permanente demonstrated that its program reduced the expected hip fracture rate by over 40% (since 1998). If implemented nationally, Kaiser estimates a similar effort could reduce the number of hip fractures by over 100,000 and save over \$5 billion/year. A recent meta-analysis of 159 publications evaluating their impact found that patients receiving care from a model post fracture program had higher rates of bone density testing (48.0% vs 23.5%), treatment initiation (38.0% vs 17.2%) and greater adherence to treatment (57.0% vs 34.1%)¹.

(Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion)

The Committee has included \$1 million for CDC to plan and begin implementation of a national education and action initiative aimed at reducing osteoporotic fractures and falls among older Americans modeled after the successful Million Hearts campaign. Such an initiative should set national goals for improving bone health through the lifetime and reducing the rate of primary and secondary osteoporotic fractures and in the rate of falls which often precipitate fractures.

Background:

In the U.S. more than 54 million people, mostly women, either already have osteoporosis or are at high risk of the disease due to low bone density. Up to 2.1 million osteoporotic bone fractures were suffered by approximately 1.8 million Medicare beneficiaries in 2016. *That is more than the number of heart attacks, strokes or new breast cancer cases.* The total annual cost for osteoporotic fractures among Medicare beneficiaries was \$57 billion in 2018 and is expected to grow to over \$95 billion in 2040 as the population ages. There are also significant racial and geographic disparities in incidence, costs and deaths from osteoporotic fractures.

Greater awareness and utilization of existing tools could lead to substantial improvements. Medicare pays for the osteoporosis screening recommended by the USPSTF, allowing for early and effective preventive steps and interventions. Yet only 8 percent of people at highest risk of a fragility fracture - women who have suffered a previous fracture - are screened for osteoporosis and about 80 percent of patients with osteoporosis go untreated even after a fracture. By comparison, while those who are hospitalized for an acute myocardial infarction (heart attack) are at a 9.2 percent risk for another AMI related hospitalization in the next year, 90 percent are started on treatment. One reason for this is that in 2012, the Department of HHS started a major national education and action initiative, Million Hearts, co-led by CDC and CMS. The national initiative successfully aligned national cardiovascular disease prevention efforts around a select set of evidence-based public health and clinical goals and strategies and has made significant progress toward preventing one million heart attacks and strokes in five years.

Given the high incidence and human and economic costs associated with both fractures and falls among older Americans, a similarly aggressive initiative aimed at these related problems is warranted and would pay dividends in terms of both patient outcomes and overall health care costs. Like heart disease, we know what steps are needed to reduce the incidence of falls and fractures among older Americans. We need to educate and activate the public and health professionals about bone health through the lifetime and reduce the toll of osteoporosis. Because we know that over 95% of hip fractures occur following a fall, such a campaign must also focus on reducing the growing rates of falls among older adults.

The start-up funding of \$1 million would be used in consultation with key stakeholders and experts to: identify target audiences; set national education and action goals for the initiative; identify needed educational materials; develop plans for effective outreach to target audiences; produce educational materials, and launch educational efforts.