



GOBERNADOR DE PUERTO RICO

Ricardo Rosselló Nevares

January 25, 2017

Acting-Secretary Norris Cochran
United States Department of Health and Human Services

Acting-Administrator Patrick Conway
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Dear Acting HHS Secretary Norris Cochran, Acting Administrator Patrick Conway,

I am writing to you on behalf of over 720,000 Medicare beneficiaries and all the citizens of Puerto Rico, to request your support for the inclusion of meaningful policy adjustments in the proposed payment rate notice for Medicare Advantage 2018, known as the *Advance Notice and Draft Call Letter*. While we take the necessary steps to immediately tackle the fiscal situation in Puerto Rico from day one of our administration, it has always been clear to me that actions to strengthen healthcare in Puerto Rico are of the highest priority. In general, Puerto Rico has approximately one third of the resources for healthcare compared to the US national average and addressing Medicare and Medicaid disparities is critical.¹ Moreover, as part of my vision and *Plan for Puerto Rico* (www.planparapuertorico.com), I have no doubt that fixing our Federal healthcare programs is not only crucial to our healthcare system, but vital to our efforts to restore the Puerto Rican economy.

The Medicare Advantage (MA) program in Puerto Rico is one of the pillars of our healthcare system, but it is suffering from disproportionate ACA related reductions in recent years. Today it serves almost 580,000 beneficiaries, including approximately 280,000 who are dually eligible, also in Medicaid. The program is also the platform for the employer health plan for over 90,000 retirees, most of them who are pensioners from our government. While some steps have been taken to address the Medicare and Medicare Advantage disparities in recent regulatory cycles, it is my duty to continue working hard on this issue until the US citizens residing in Puerto Rico can obtain the equal treatment they deserve as American citizens.

The next tangible and critical vehicle for HHS and CMS to take action is the *Medicare Advantage Advance Notice and Draft Call Letter for 2018*. Recent reductions are the main cause of the current financial challenges in health care, which have in turn accelerated the outward migration of healthcare professionals. Pending Congressional resolution, additional administrative fixes are critical to mitigate increasing adverse

¹ ASPE Issue Brief. *Evidence Indicates a Range of Challenges for Puerto Rico Health Care System*. Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, HHS. January 2017.



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impacts to benefits, access to care, and provider migration. I feel encouraged by the opportunity of meaningful Federal administrative action in the *Advance Notice and Draft Call letter for 2018* and the reaffirmation that Medicare service providers and beneficiaries are first as we start our new Administration. Every step towards equal treatment counts and our healthcare system needs help urgently. I look forward to the continued collaboration, working with meaningful proposals that protect and enhance funding levels in the upcoming proposed rule.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ricardo Roselló Nevares", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ricardo Roselló Nevares, Ph.D.
Governor of Puerto Rico

CC.

Honorable Thomas Price, MD

Secretary Nominee

United States Department Health and Human Services