

Cancer Drug Parity Act of 2019

Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Jerry Moran (R-KS)

The Cancer Drug Parity Act would help make life-improving and lifesaving oral cancer medications affordable to the millions of Americans suffering from cancer. While we've seen tremendous advances in the treatment of cancer in recent years, the way healthcare covers cancer treatments has lagged behind. This bill follows legislation enacted in over 40 states by ensuring that oral cancer drugs are covered in the same way as traditional intravenous (IV) chemotherapy.

Nearly 40 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetimes. And, in just 2018, an estimated 1.7 million Americans received a cancer diagnosis. This is a terrible disease, but for many, the advances in oral cancer medications have made a real difference. This medicine is less intrusive than traditional IV treatments, allows patients to receive treatment in their homes, and for many, has turned what was once a death sentence into a manageable disease.

Despite all these benefits, copays for oral cancer medications can make prescriptions unaffordable. While IV treatments are covered under a healthcare plan's medical benefits, meaning moderate to minimal copays, oral cancer medications are self-administered and covered under pharmacy benefits. This means patients are required to pay a percentage of the medication's overall cost, leading to high, often unaffordable copays. In 2017, researchers found that copays were \$2,000 or more for one in eight cancer patients who were prescribed oral cancer drugs. And due to this cost, nearly half of these patients didn't pick up their initial prescription, foregoing care they need.

States have already started taking action to help these patients, with over 40 states and the District of Columbia enacting "oral parity" laws that stop health plans from creating separate cost-sharing plans for oral and self-administered cancer medicines. These laws have made a difference for those suffering from cancer. In 2017, researchers found that in states with oral parity laws, zero-dollar copays more than tripled from 15 to 53 percent for oral cancer medications.

The Cancer Drug Parity Act would build on this work, expanding these protections to privately insured patients whose healthcare is regulated at the federal level. Specifically, this bill would:

- Prevent insurers from covering oral and self-administered medicines at different cost sharing rates than IV chemotherapy.
- Not mandate that healthcare plans provide chemotherapy coverage, but rather only apply to plans already covering chemotherapy.