



Sen. Casey's Opening Statement
Promoting Healthy Aging: Living Your Best Life Long Into Your Golden Years
September 25, 2019

Chairman Collins, thank you for holding this hearing.

“When it comes to healthy aging, we have news to celebrate. On average, people are living longer. And, as life expectancy has increased, health has improved. We can attribute much of this success to advances in medical research and treatment, dedicated health professionals and of course programs like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the Older Americans Act.”

“I spend a significant amount of my time thinking about how these federally funded programs promote health security and financial security, and even more time fighting for policies to protect and strengthen them. During our hearing today, I'd like to highlight the important role of Medicare and discuss ways that we can improve the program in order to further promote healthy aging.”

“Medicare is the only game in town when it comes to health insurance for most people 65 years of and older. In Pennsylvania for example, over 2.7 million people receive their coverage through Medicare. It ensures that individuals have coverage for preventive care, necessary medical care and prescription drugs.”

“However, Medicare is not required to cover dental, hearing or vision services. To expand upon a tweet from Gretchen Jacobson, a Medicare expert from the Kaiser Family Foundation: While every single individual on Medicare has teeth and/or gums, eyes and ears, they do not all have insurance to help cover the costs of dental, vision and hearing services.”

“This is a barrier to healthy aging.”

“I received a letter recently from Helen Sheehy of Tyrone, Pennsylvania about this very issue. Chairmain Collins, I ask consent to have letter from Helen Sheehy to be entered into the record.”

“Her letter begins, *“I am writing to you about serious gaps in Medicare coverage that I hope you, through the Special Committee on Aging, could begin to address.”* Helen goes on to write about how Medicare covered the care her husband, Jim, received following a cancer diagnosis – surgery, chemotherapy and radiation.”

“As a result of Jim's treatment, his teeth were seriously damaged and most of them had to be removed. Helen goes on to explain that the medical bill for this care was \$31,000. Mrs. Sheehy closes the letter by writing: “Apparently, the dental exclusions have been in place for decades. Because we now know that there is a direct connection between dental health and an

individual's overall health, I am hoping that you will think the time is ripe to rethink these provisions." I agree with Helen. The time is ripe to rethink these provisions."

"It is for this reason that I have introduced legislation, the Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision and Hearing Benefits Act, to expand Medicare and Medicaid coverage not just for dental services, but for hearing and vision care, as well."

"We can find story after story about the need for these basic benefits. We know that a simple eye exam can lead to the early detection of hypertension and high cholesterol. If someone has trouble conversing with others due to hearing loss, research tells us that there will be a greater likelihood of mental health issues, dementia and social isolation. And the list of examples goes on from there."

"We have a responsibility to ensure that our aging loved ones receive the critical health care services they need to lead the most active and healthy lifestyle possible. Again, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, thank them for their testimony and also look forward to a discussion about this important topic. Thank you."