

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

We write to express our support for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's recent update to its colorectal cancer screening guidelines. The draft recommendation, released on October 27, 2020, lowers the recommended screening age for those at average risk from age 50 to 45. This change will ensure thousands of Americans have coverage and access to vital screening services. We would like to affirm our support of the recommendation with data from researchers and insights from our constituents about why this change is so important.

An increasing number of young Americans are being diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Since 1994, cases of colorectal cancer in those under 50 have increased by 51%, leading to a drop in the median age of diagnosis from 72 to 66. In a 2015 study, researchers at MD Anderson Cancer Center¹ found that, by 2030, rates of colon cancer will increase by 90% for people ages 20-34 and 27.7% for people ages 35-49. Although overall colorectal cancer death rates are dropping in the U.S., deaths among people younger than 55 actually *increased* 2% per year from 2007 to 2016.

According to the American Cancer Society², in the U.S. this year alone:

- **147,950** people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer
- **53,200** will die from the disease
- **17,930** of those newly diagnosed cases and **3,640 deaths** are expected **among people under 50**—or approximately **49 new cases and 10 deaths per day**.

The American Cancer Society acknowledged this alarming rise in young-onset colorectal cancer, updating its own guidelines to recommend screenings begin at age 45. However, because the USPSTF guidelines determine whether a preventive service will be covered under U.S. health insurance plans, until USPSTF finalizes a lower recommended screening age, patients

¹ Bailey CE, Hu C, You YN, et al. Increasing Disparities in the Age-Related Incidences of Colon and Rectal Cancers in the United States, 1975-2010. *JAMA Surg.* 2015;150(1):17–22. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2014.1756

² American Cancer Society. *Colorectal Cancer Facts & Figures 2020-2022*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2020.

under 50 will continue to encounter significant barriers to screening, such as high out-of-pocket costs.

These financial barriers increase the risk of an undiagnosed cancer. If not caught early, these cases may progress to an advanced stage when treatment is less likely to be effective. Considering that colonoscopies are one of a few screenings that can prevent cancer from developing if colorectal polyps or precancerous tissue found are found and removed, we should be working to ensure that this preventive screening is easily-accessible and affordable.

By aligning the guidelines with what the science is telling us, as well as guidelines from other prominent cancer organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the USPSTF can enable thousands of Americans at-risk for cancer to access the screenings they need.

We have heard countless stories from survivors, caregivers and their clinicians in our states about the horrors of this disease and its devastating effect. Lowering the recommended age for colorectal cancer screenings will save lives and help us address the alarming increase in colorectal cancer rates in young people.

We urge you to ensure USPSTF finalizes their draft recommendations to lower the colorectal cancer screening age to at least 45-years-old. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jamie Raskin

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

/s/ Rodney Davis

Rodney Davis
Member of Congress

/s/ Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ Brian Fitzpatrick

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

/s/ Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ Tom Malinowski

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

/s/ Bill Foster

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Member of Congress

/s/ Mark Pocan

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Member of Congress

/s/ Gregory W. Meeks

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Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Napolitano

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Member of Congress

/s/ Barbara Lee

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Member of Congress

/s/ Steve Cohen

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Member of Congress

/s/ James P. McGovern

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Member of Congress

/s/ Mikie Sherrill

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Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone

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Member of Congress

/s/ Gwen Moore

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Member of Congress

/s/ A. Donald McEachin

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Member of Congress

/s/ Jahana Hayes

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/s/ Alcee L. Hastings

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/s/ Daniel W. Lipinski

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/s/ Emanuel Cleaver, II

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/s/ Raja Krishnamoorthi

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