

The Getting Early Treatment and Comprehensive Assessments Reduces Emergencies “GET CARE” Act

Senator Mark R. Warner and Senator Tim Scott

Background and Need for Legislation

During the immediate response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, most health care providers adjusted their model of care to help limit face-to-face interaction and slow the spread of the virus, restricting office appointments to emergency needs. Many providers stopped seeing patients in person for routine preventive health care procedures and screenings. In most states, governors issued executive orders suspending all elective procedures for a period of time.

According to Reuters, diagnostic panels and cancer screenings fell by 68% nationally and even more in coronavirus hotspots since mid-March.¹ The American Cancer Society reported “a substantial decline in cancer screening.”² According to analysis by the Epic Health Research Network, between March 15th and June 16th, about 65% of breast, colon, and cervical exams to prevent cancer were missed.³ Childhood vaccine rates are still down in at least 20 states, causing potential concern for another emerging public health crisis if infection for other preventable diseases rises during the pandemic.

Preventive care plays a crucial role in detecting diseases and medical conditions that can lead to more critical care if screenings are delayed or cancelled. This can be dangerous for patients who may suffer significantly from easily preventable diseases or medical condition. Unfortunately, many Americans are still reluctant to visit health care providers for non-emergency services.⁴

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that if everyone in the U.S. received recommended preventive care, then the health care system could save over 100,000 lives a year.⁵

Preventive care is also cost-effective. According to the CDC, chronic diseases that are avoidable through preventive care services account for more than 75% of the nation’s health care spending.⁶

Summary of Legislation

The Getting Early Treatment and Comprehensive Assessments Reduces Emergencies Act (GET CARE) Act authorizes a public awareness campaign to increase the utilization of preventive health services by raising awareness of the importance of and safety in seeking preventive care

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-screenings-exc/exclusive-u-s-medical-testing-cancer-screenings-plunge-during-coronavirus-outbreak-data-firm-analysis-idUSKCN22A0DY>

² <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines.html>

³ <https://lowinstitute.org/reduced-cancer-screenings-in-covid-19/>

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/five-kinds-of-health-appointments-you-should-consider-keeping-despite-the-pandemic/2020/07/01/d04f5848-bbc4-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/pdf/2009-power-of-prevention.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/costs/index.htm>

during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill would direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to award competitive grants to public or private entities to carry out a national, evidence-based campaign to:

- Increase awareness of the importance of recommended preventive care services for the prevention of and control of diseases, illness and other medical conditions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Combat misinformation about seeking preventive care during the pandemic; and
- Disseminate scientific, evidence-based preventive care-related information to increase the utilization of preventive care services.
- Ensure the public awareness campaign is appropriately tailored to medically underserved communities, racial and ethnic minorities and communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting Organizations Include:

American College of Preventive Medicine, American Public Health Association, American Hospital Association, Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association, Ballad Health System and Inova Health System