



# Advocacy in **ACTION**

Fighting for People with Arthritis



**September 29, 2014**

## **New California Law Requires Better Disclosure of Health Plan Coverage and Cost Sharing**

The Arthritis Foundation successfully worked for passage of California SB 1052 signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown. The bill requires formulary transparency in health insurance plans, making it easier for people with arthritis to make sure the health plan they choose covers the prescription drugs they need. The bill becomes effective January 1, 2015.

Many specialty drugs can be extremely expensive and individuals living with arthritis often cannot obtain the information they need to confirm the cost sharing, prior authorization and step therapy requirements or coverage for their medications. Formulary transparency in health insurance plans will create a “window shopping” feature on websites to allow consumers to search for coverage by prescription drug or condition.

The Arthritis Foundation was actively involved in the passage of this important transparency legislation, including presenting advocate witness testimony during hearings, amendment language, letters from Arthritis Ambassadors and op-eds. Enacting transparency legislation in the states is a key priority for the Arthritis Foundation.

## **Arthritis Foundation Helps Start the Process for Limiting Out-of-Pocket Caps**

The Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, a Joint Committee of the General Assembly, has released its study on “Prescription Drug Specialty Tiers in Pennsylvania.” The report examined the impact of specialty tier drugs on the access and care of people with chronic or life-threatening conditions like arthritis.

The report's findings and recommendations will be used to develop legislation to help reduce the out-of-pocket costs for people with chronic or life-threatening diseases. The committee acknowledged the Arthritis Foundation for their consultation and assistance in the development of this report.

### **Arthritis Foundation Hosts Important Congressional Briefing on Back Pain and Ankylosing Spondylitis**

Arthritis Foundation President and CEO Ann Palmer moderated a congressional briefing hosted by the AF on back pain and ankylosing spondylitis on September 5. The briefing featured two patients, AS patient Dennis Smoot and Washington Wizards player Martell Webster, and two physicians, osteopathic back pain specialist Dr. George Pasuarello and a rheumatologist, Dr. David Borenstein. The panelists did a great job of highlighting the important challenges of access to treatment, early diagnosis, and the physical and financial costs of both diseases.

The briefing was attended by congressional offices and generated a lot of interest in the issue of back pain among congressional staff. The NIH Pain Consortium tweeted about the event, and a video clip appeared on the Washington Wizards' media outlet, Monumental Network. Our call to action was for members of Congress to join the Arthritis Caucus and consider pain issues in any future legislation. A video of the briefing will be available online shortly.

### **Biosimilars Guidance Could Have Big Impact on Arthritis Patients**

The health care community is anxiously awaiting guidance from the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) on the biosimilars naming policy. Biosimilars are drugs that are deemed to be "highly similar" to an already approved biologic drug. For some arthritis patients, biologic drugs are often the best medications to manage their symptoms, and biosimilars hold great promise for patients who do not have access to biologics and may make these treatments more widely available. In July the FDA accepted its first biosimilar application, which makes the timely release of this guidance critical.

To ensure patient safety, the Arthritis Foundation believes that all biologic products should have distinguishable names, because even small differences between a biosimilar and a biologic may have a huge impact on patients. Foundation President and CEO Ann Palmer wrote a letter to the FDA in August articulating this message, and Sandie Preiss, our vice president of Advocacy and Access, has formally requested a meeting with FDA Commissioner Dr. Margaret Hamburg and Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell to provide information about the importance of these issues to people with arthritis.

### **CDC Arthritis Program Threatened, AF Steps in to Protect Funding**

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The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee tasked with setting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) budget each year zeroed out funding for the Arthritis Program in its FY 2015 bill. The Arthritis Foundation has taken a leadership role in making sure the program remains fully funded at \$13 million. We formed a coalition of partner organizations to coordinate efforts and provide a strong showing of support on the Hill, including sending a letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, meeting with CDC staff, and personal meetings with Appropriations Committee staff. We are pleased to announce that the Arthritis Program was level funded in the Continuing Resolution (CR) passed by Congress in mid-September. This CR funds the government through mid-December. The Foundation will continue its work to build support with decision makers for the program and to protect funding for the CDC Arthritis program.

*This is a publication from the Arthritis Foundation Advocacy and Access Department  
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