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Arthritis Foundation Praises Budget Deal, Permanent Repeal of Therapy Caps

ATLANTA, Ga. – Early Friday morning, Congress passed a significant bipartisan budget agreement that would fund many health care priorities important to the arthritis community, raise the budget caps for discretionary spending, and bring Congress closer to closing out work on the fiscal year 2018 appropriations process.

“The Arthritis Foundation believes people with arthritis should not fear that they will be unable to afford or access health care,” said Ann M. Palmer, president and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation. “This bipartisan budget agreement takes critical action on a number of policies important to the arthritis community and we look forward to building on this momentum to address other areas of bipartisan consensus in both chambers of Congress.”

The legislation also permanently repeals the Medicare payment cap for outpatient therapy services, which has been in place for nearly two decades. The therapy cap limited the amount of outpatient rehabilitation services that the Medicare program would cover. Physical and occupational therapy plays an important role in the treatment of arthritis by improving mobility and restoring the use of affected joints, increasing strength to support the joints, and maintaining fitness and the ability to perform daily activities. Permanent repeal of the payment cap means that Medicare beneficiaries with arthritis will no longer be denied access to needed health care services regardless of medical necessity.

In addition, the bill ensures that biosimilars will be subject to the same discounts as branded biologics in the Part D coverage gap or “donut hole,” which will help make them more accessible to patients. Biosimilars have the potential to provide safe and effective treatment to people with arthritis at a lower cost than name-brand biologic medications.

Further, the bill funds the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) for two years, which helps place providers in underserved communities; extends the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for an additional four years through 2027; and includes \$2 billion in new funding for research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a sizeable increase for important research across all NIH Institutes and Centers, including the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.