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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Wider Opportunities for Women Recognizes Medicare's Strides and Struggles**

**WASHINGTON, DC** – On this 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Medicare, Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) applauds the strengthening of Medicare through key elements in the Affordable Care Act while at the same time recognizing more must be done to strengthen the program. Medicare provides health care coverage for 47 million Americans and eases the burden of skyrocketing costs for millions of elders. “The availability of Medicare is critical to an elder’s ability to be economically secure,” said Joan Kuriansky, Executive Director of WOW. “The steps taken by Congress to strengthen benefits for the short term and ensure program solvency for the long term are a step in the right direction.”

In particular, the Affordable Care Act extends the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund by 12 years and ensures discounts on prescription drugs to close the infamous donut hole which will benefit many seniors by lowering their out-of-pocket expenses. “Far too many seniors are paying too much out-of-pocket for health care needs, and relying on savings, credit cards or family members to make ends meet,” said Kuriansky. “These health reform measures, aimed to alleviate the financial burden of health care costs, are a definite part of the solution.”

WOW’s [Elder Economic Security Standard Index](#) (Elder Index), a geographically-based measure of income adequacy for elders age 65 and over, shows that health care is the second highest expense for elders in good health. In 2009, the average annual out-of-pocket cost for elders in good health was \$2,808 according to the Elder Index. Overall costs can double or even triple for an elder that needs home and community-based long-term care services and supports.

Medicare is still in jeopardy of benefit cuts. The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform is charged with recommending ways to reduce the federal deficit and all programs are under consideration for potential cuts. WOW urges the Commission and Congress to allow the Medicare savings that will result from health care reform time to emerge before taking additional action, and to not cut programs, such as Medicare, which help elders and their families make ends meet.

Data on what it takes for elders to age in place in their communities, including state and county data on long-term care expenses, is now available through the Elder Economic Security Standard Index for the following states: [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Wisconsin](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Minnesota](#), [New Jersey](#), [Connecticut](#), [Michigan](#), [New York](#) and [West Virginia](#).

**Wider Opportunities for Women**

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) works nationally and in its home community of Washington DC to achieve economic independence and equality of opportunity for women and their families throughout their lifetime. For over 45 years, WOW has been a leader in the areas of non-traditional employment, job training and education, and welfare to work policies. Since 1995, WOW has been committed to the self-sufficiency of women and their families through the national Family Economic Security (FES) Project. Through FES, WOW reframed the national debate on social policies and programs from one that focuses on poverty to one that focuses on what families need to make ends meet. Building on FES, WOW expanded to meet its intergenerational mission with the launching of the national Elder Economic Security Initiative. Together WOW works with lead partners in 40 states and with thousands of local and state organizations.

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