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## **[Medicare \(usw.to/4hp\)](http://usw.to/4hp)**

In the 1930s, the Great Depression peaked and working-class people found it harder and harder to provide for their families. Our nation's seniors were among some of the hardest hit. At that time, many depended on their children to help provide for them in their golden years. However, during the worst economic crisis the country had ever seen, even their sons and daughters were unable to find adequate work.

The primary financial stress that seniors faced was medical care. As life expectancy began to rise, so too did the cost of care. It was clear that something needed to be done. The enactment of the Social Security Act in 1935 was a good first step, but as health care costs continued to skyrocket, affordable, quality health insurance was unattainable for most of the nation, especially our seniors. Thirty years later, after countless legislative solutions to address the problem failed to pass Congress, President Johnson's plan to create a national health insurance for everyone 65 and older was signed into law on July 30, 1965. It should be noted that this solution was originally proposed by President Truman in 1945 but failed to get the support it needed. President Johnson recognized President Truman's efforts by signing the Medicare and Medicaid Act into law at the Truman Presidential Library in Independence, MO, with Truman by his side.

Medicare is federal health insurance for anyone age 65 and older, younger people who meet specific eligibility criteria, and individuals with certain diseases. In the first week, over one million people enrolled in the program and today over 63 million people have Medicare coverage. Though Medicare started as a basic insurance program for older Americans, Congress has made changes over the years to provide more and more Americans with access to the quality and affordable health care they need. Some of these changes and additions include:

- Expansions to include younger adults with disabilities and end stage kidney disease.
- Hospice benefits.
- New payment systems to help control costs and allow Medicare to pay fixed rates instead of what hospitals choose to charge.
- Prescription drug benefits and catastrophic coverage.
- Free preventative care benefits including annual physicals, wellness exams, and tests.

While this program isn't perfect, at its inception in 1965 roughly 50% of our nation's seniors had health insurance, by 1970 that number jumped to 96%. Today over 18% of Americans rely on some form of Medicare for their health insurance coverage. The program is currently projected to be fully funded through 2028. Any cuts to this vital program would create added stress and financial burden to millions of our nation's most vulnerable.

Retirement security is the number one issue that our members care about, according to our latest [Your Union, Your Voice Survey results \(usw.to/results\)](http://usw.to/results). However, it comes as no surprise that affordable health care and prescription drugs came in at a close second. That is precisely why we are calling on Congress to raise or eliminate the debt ceiling with no cuts to Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid. Will you join us?

**Go to [usw.to/NoCuts](http://usw.to/NoCuts) to find out how your local can get involved today!**

