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Wasserman Schultz Introduces Bipartisan Genetic Cancer Testing Access Expansion

Washington DC – Today, U.S. Reps. **Debbie Wasserman Schultz** (FL-23), **Mariannette Miller-Meeks** (IA-02), **Elissa Slotkin** (MI-08), and **Rodney Davis** (IL-13) introduced bipartisan legislation to expand access to lifesaving genetic testing used to determine an individual's risk of developing hereditary cancer.

The Reducing Hereditary Cancer Act is supported by **Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered** (FORCE), **National Comprehensive Cancer Network** (NCCN), and **American Society of Clinical Oncology** (ASCO), and would ensure Medicare beneficiaries can access genetic testing for cancer risk and take advantage of medically necessary, guideline-recommended screening and risk reducing interventions. Tomorrow, June 24, at 2:00 PM EDT, Rep. Wasserman Schultz will join leading experts to discuss the value of genetic testing for inherited mutations associated with increased cancer risk. Interested parties can RSVP here.

Medicare currently covers genetic testing only for beneficiaries already diagnosed with cancer, regardless of family cancer history or a known genetic mutation in the family. If an individual without cancer carries an inherited mutation causing increased cancer risk, coverage of the medically necessary high-risk cancer screenings or risk-reducing interventions is statutorily prohibited.

With the availability of low-cost genetic testing, a growing number of Medicare beneficiaries learn they have an inherited genetic mutation that significantly increases their cancer risk, but are unable to access the evidence-based services they need to prevent or detect cancer earlier, when it is less invasive, less costly and more easily treated. This lack of coverage disproportionately affects low-income individuals and exacerbates health disparities.

"When I found out I had cancer at a young age, I didn't know how heavily genetics impacted my risk," said **Rep. Wasserman Schultz**, who was diagnosed with breast cancer and the BRCA2 gene mutation at age 41 and after seven surgeries, is now more than a decade cancer-free. "Genetic markers like the BRCA mutations are now easily detectable with routine genetic testing, and knowledge of an inherited mutation can be life-saving. It's nonsensical that Medicare doesn't allow individuals to access this inexpensive testing until they have received a potentially terminal cancer diagnosis. By expanding access to genetic testing, we empower an entire generation to learn their risk and take action before it's too late."

"As a doctor, I know that one of the best ways to treat and beat cancer is early detection. Individuals on Medicare need to be able to access preventative healthcare services," said **Rep. Miller-Meeks**. "Our Reducing Hereditary Cancer Act will allow Medicare to cover genetic testing, cancer screenings, and risk-reducing surgeries. I am proud to introduce this commonsense legislation to give patients access to the care they need to live better lives."

"Hereditary cancers have impacted the lives of so many American families, including mine: I lost my mother to ovarian cancer in 2011 when she was 64 after she also survived breast cancer in her early 30s," said **Rep. Slotkin.** "Before her, my grandmother died of ovarian cancer at age 39, when my mom was just a child. As things stand now, those who are most at risk of contracting cancer because of their genetic history - like my mom - often lack access to essential genetic screening and preventative services. This bill is a practical, bipartisan step that does something simple: expanding Medicare's coverage of genetic testing and preventive treatment. It will save lives.

"Cancer is a terrible disease, but in many cases, it can be mitigated or prevented with testing," said **Rep. Davis**. "That's why our bipartisan legislation is so important. Our bill would expand access to genetic testing of cancer for individuals participating in Medicare who have a known hereditary cancer mutation in their family and suspicious family history with hereditary cancer. As someone whose wife was diagnosed and treated for a genetic form of cancer that can affect our children, I know how important testing is. It can save lives."

As recommended by medical experts, this legislation will enable coverage of genetic testing for inherited mutations known to significantly increase cancer risk in two Medicare populations: those with a known hereditary cancer mutation in their family as well as those with a personal or family history suspicious for hereditary cancer. For Medicare beneficiaries who have an inherited mutation causing a moderate to significant increased risk of cancer, the law will enable coverage of expert-recommended increased cancer screening (e.g. breast MRIs, more frequent colonoscopies) and risk-reducing surgeries (e.g. removal of ovaries and fallopian tubes).

"We're proud to be a part of the effort to remedy this long-standing gap in Medicare coverage," said **Lisa Schlager**, Vice President of Public Policy at FORCE. "Private insurers and the majority of Medicaid programs cover these medically necessary genetic testing, screening and preventive services. Medicare beneficiaries with a hereditary predisposition to cancer deserve the same evidence-based care to prevent or detect cancer earlier, when it is easier and less expensive to treat. People with inherited genetic mutations, such as BRCA, ATM or Lynch syndrome, are the poster children for prevention. Ultimately, lives and money will be saved!"

"We have an opportunity to save people from preventable pain and suffering, and losing their lives or their loved ones to cancer," said NCCN CEO **Robert W. Carlson, MD.** "Leading experts agree that genetic testing for people with familial risk followed by appropriate action greatly aids in saving lives and avoiding costly care in the future. The 'Reducing Hereditary Cancer Act' would improve health outcomes and health equity by providing Medicare recipients with the same evidence-based, guideline-recommended care that people with private insurance are already getting. We applaud the bipartisan sponsors behind this new effort to bring Medicare's cancer prevention coverage into the modern era."

"As oncologists, we are committed to ensuring cancer patients have access to the highest quality and equitable cancer care," said ASCO Board Chair **Howard "Skip" Burris, MD**. Recent advancements in our ability to test for and detect genetic mutations linked to hereditary cancers allows the potential to inform, educate, and treat patients prior to being diagnosed with cancer, and can potentially be lifesaving for patients. Unfortunately, Medicare is currently prevented from covering preventive services unless explicitly authorized by Congress. Regardless of family history, tests performed in the absence of signs, symptoms, or personal histories of disease are not covered. ASCO is pleased to endorse the Reducing Hereditary Cancer Act, which would remedy this by allowing Medicare to cover genetic testing for inherited mutations for beneficiaries with a family history of a hereditary cancer gene mutation or family history of hereditary cancer, and provide coverage of screenings and risk-reducing surgeries for those affected."

The full text of the bill can be found here. A full list of supporting organizations can be found here.

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