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For 2 out of 5 Breast Cancer Survivors, Life-Long Lymphedema Follows

Breast Cancer Awareness Month isn't just about early detection and beating cancer, it's also about living well after cancer.

WASHINGTON, D.C. [October 8, 2020] Each year in America, approximately 325,000 women and 2,600 men are diagnosed with breast cancer. As survivorship increases, so too does the prevalence of cancer-related lymphedema, a chronic and potentially debilitating disease that afflicts 40% of all breast cancer survivors and requires daily, life-long management.

"Lymphedema is one of the most significant survivorship issues," says Heather Ferguson, Founder and Executive Director of the Lymphedema Advocacy Group. *"It affects survivors not only physically, with the potential for disfiguring and disabling consequences, but can also have significant psychosocial and economic impact."*

In 1998, recognizing the importance of comprehensive care both during and after breast cancer treatment, Congress passed the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act. Unfortunately, the coverage for medical compression supplies afforded to women through the WHCRA ends when these survivors reach Medicare age.

Due to an unintended gap in coverage, Medicare is currently unable to provide coverage for the compression garments and supplies that are the cornerstone of lymphedema treatment. But fortunately, a commonsense bipartisan solution is at hand.

The **Lymphedema Treatment Act (S.518/H.R.1948)**, sponsored by Senator Maria Cantwell (WA) and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-9), will amend Medicare statute to create a benefit category under which these medically necessary, prescribed supplies can be covered. With over 380 House and 70 Senate cosponsors, this is the most supported healthcare bill before Congress.

Especially in the midst of a pandemic, access to the medical supplies that enable patients to safely manage their condition at home must be a priority. The use of medical compression has been shown to reduce lymphedema-related infections by more than 75% and reduce hospitalizations for this high-risk patient population by more than 50%.

In honor of October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it's time for Congress to advance the Lymphedema Treatment Act, get it signed into law this year, and ensure that survivors have access to the medical supplies they need to live a full and productive life after beating cancer.

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About the Lymphedema Advocacy Group

The [Lymphedema Advocacy Group](#) is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization of patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals and industry partners. Our mission is to advance lymphedema care in the United States by advocating for improved insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. The Lymphedema Advocacy Group is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization.

Resources cited:

- 1.) <https://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer/statistics>
- 2.) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2645852/>
- 3.) <https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncr.25458>
- 4.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Impact-of-Lymphedema-on-Cancer-Survivors.pdf>
- 5.) https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Programs-and-Initiatives/Other-Insurance-Protections/whcra_factsheet
- 6.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Function-of-Compression.pdf>
- 7.) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/518>, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1948>
- 8.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Reducing-Infections-and-Hospitalizations-Through-the-Use-of-Compression.pdf>