

## **Survival Aid For Emergencies (SAFE) through Medicare Act**

### **Senator Edward J. Markey & Representative Maxwell Alejandro Frost**

*This bill would include solar batteries, heat pumps, and other resiliency measures as eligible Medicare expenses, so seniors and people with disabilities can install life-saving, resilient home infrastructure to protect their health in extreme weather and blackouts.*

Stronger storms and hotter heatwaves are wreaking havoc across our country, and for those with medical conditions, extreme weather disasters pose an additionally deadly threat. Disruptions to electric power—whether from hurricanes, wildfires, or other disasters—are a matter of life or death for many.<sup>1</sup> During Hurricane Maria, medical complications related to the power outage were responsible for nearly a third of the more than 4,500 deaths,<sup>2</sup> and power outages were linked to more than 15 percent of over 100 deaths attributed to Hurricane Irma in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Medicare beneficiaries represent up to 90 percent of the population dependent upon electricity for in-home medical equipment.<sup>4</sup> Even when the grid stays online, seniors are disproportionately vulnerable to the consequences of living without home infrastructure like air conditioning, which becomes deadly during increasingly severe heatwaves.<sup>5,6</sup> As the climate crisis intensifies, these basic home resiliency technologies are key medical necessities. The *SAFE through Medicare Act* would help seniors afford these technologies. This legislation is a matter of health justice, disability justice, and climate justice.

The **SAFE through Medicare Act** would:

- Expand Medicare to cover “home resiliency services,” defined as items or services that the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) determines are medically necessary for an individual who is medically at-risk in the event of a climate or manmade disaster.
  - The Secretary shall consult with the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a process to determine which individuals are medically at-risk from climate-related or human-caused disasters, including extreme heat, extreme cold, flooding, and loss of power.
  - The process shall consider geographic risk, regional history of disasters, medical reliance on sensitive equipment and supplies, and chronic medical conditions and comorbidities
- Medicare shall cover home resiliency services at 100% coverage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alice Wong, *California’s power outages are a life-and-death issue*, High Country News (Jan. 19, 2023), <https://www.hcn.org/issues/55.3/ideas-social-justice-californias-power-outages-are-a-life-and-death-issue>

<sup>2</sup> Nishant Kishore et al., *Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria*, 379 N.E.J.Med. 2, 162-170 (Jul. 12, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Anindita Issa et al., *Deaths Related to Hurricane Irma—Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, September 4-October 10, 2017*, 67 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control 30, 829-832 (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Marriele Mango & Annie Shapiro, *Home Health Care in the Dark*, Clean Energy Group (Jun. 2019), <https://www.cleaneenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/Home-Health-Care-in-the-Dark.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Mann & Jenny Schuetz, *As extreme heat grips the globe, access to air conditioning is an urgent public health issue*, Brookings Institute (Jul. 25, 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2022/07/25/as-extreme-heat-grips-the-globe-access-to-air-conditioning-is-an-urgent-public-health-issue/>

<sup>6</sup> Amelia Templeton, *Multnomah County: Lack of air conditioning was a prime factor in heat-wave deaths*, Oregon Public Broadcasting (Jul. 13, 2021), <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/07/13/portland-oregon-heat-wave-deaths-air-conditioning/>