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Global Kidney Summit Honors Former HHS Secretary Alex M. Azar

Receives Inaugural Global Kidney Leadership and Innovation Award

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP), the largest independent kidney patient organization in the nation, today announced that The Honorable Alex M. Azar II, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), will receive the inaugural Kidney Leadership and Innovation Award at the patient-led [5th Annual Global Summit on Kidney Disease Innovations](#).

Founded in 2019, the *Global Summit* is a partnership of AAKP and the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences (GWU/SMHS). The *Global Summit* has grown its reach to over 95 countries and audiences in the tens of thousands through its engagement in real time and OnDemand programming. The event is designed to bring together patient advocacy organizations, academic institutions, scientists, entrepreneurs and medical industry professionals, and public officials across the world to raise awareness of the burdens of kidney disease on people and nations. Further, the *Global Summit* encourages all participants to collaborate to achieve more common sense regulatory and payment policies that align, and not hinder, rapid innovations in kidney care that will save more lives. Kidney disease is both a healthcare and workforce issue. Over 840 million people suffer from kidney disease and kidney failure across the globe. In the United States alone, over 37 million people suffer from kidney disease, over 700,00 live with kidney failure, and nearly 100,000 are on the waiting list for a kidney transplant.

AAKP President and Chair of the AAKP Veterans Health Initiative [Edward V. Hickey, III, USMC](#), stated, "Secretary Azar drove a historic shift, with global implications, in how kidney patients are viewed and must be engaged as equal stakeholders within the policy development process and across all regulatory and payment decisions that determine timely access to care innovations. The Secretary had the courage to question status quo kidney care and its high mortality rates and sided with patients who refused to settle for the innovation stagnation that had grown to characterize kidney medicine. We are pleased to honor him for the alternative vision he established—a future where patient-centered medicine emphasizes earlier disease detection and treatment, greater patient care choice of home dialysis and transplantation, and the rapid development of innovations, including artificial organs." [Hickey](#) is a kidney patient and attorney with professional experience as a senior staff member on Capitol Hill and appointed service under two presidents, including at the U.S. Department of Commerce. He is also Chair of AAKP's [Veteran's Health Initiative](#) and is involved with veteran

service organizations aiding homeless veterans and advancing protections for their earned legal rights and benefits.

[Paul T. Conway](#), Co-Chair of the *Global Summit* and Chair of AAKP's Policy and Global Affairs, stated, "Secretary Azar is a genuine champion for kidney patients and their families and has a deep understanding of how stakeholder and community engagement determines the success of patient-centered medicine and treatment innovation. Elevating bold leadership and new ideas to help people in need are hallmarks of the *Global Summit*, and thanks to the tremendous ongoing support of Dean Barbara Bass and the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, this event has become a powerful platform for facilitating global and local impacts in kidney medicine. Patients and professionals across the world look to the *Global Summit* for ideas on how they can collaborate with private industry and their governments to fight kidney disease and foster innovation. Secretary Azar's exemplary efforts are a widely recognized model for how to achieve results." Conway is a 45-year kidney patient who has lived for 26 years with a kidney transplant. He has served in multiple presidential administrations and is a former Chief of Staff for the U.S. Department of Labor for former Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

During his tenure as the 24th HHS Secretary, Azar spearheaded many substantive kidney policy efforts, including new payment models that emphasized upstream care and earlier intervention, greater opportunities for organ transplants, and other policy initiatives, including those that led to the historic 2019 *Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health Initiative*. Secretary Azar and his team actively engaged all kidney community stakeholders, particularly kidney patients, to gain insights on the barriers and opportunities for innovations in kidney care. AAKP worked closely with Secretary Azar and his staff to provide insights on patient demands for care options that would better enable them to pursue their aspirations, including maintaining careers through full-time and part-time work, home ownership, starting a family, and secure retirement. To support the principles of patient care choice and innovation outlined in the *Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health Initiative*, AAKP launched The Decade of the Kidney™ in 2019 to organize patients globally to demand greater care choice, precision medicine, greater access to kidney transplantation and less organ discards, artificial kidneys, and a departure from the default reliance on burdensome and highly antiquated in-center kidney dialysis care.

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About the American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP): Since 1969, AAKP has been a patient-led organization driving policy discussions on kidney patient consumer care choice and treatment innovation. In 2018, AAKP established the first and largest U.S. kidney voter registration program, *KidneyVoters*™. Over the past decade, AAKP patient advocates have helped advance lifetime transplant drug coverage for kidney transplant recipients (2020); patient-centered policies via the White House *Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health* (2019); new job protections for living organ donors under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) via the U.S. Department of Labor (2018); and Congressional legislation allowing HIV-positive organ transplants for HIV-positive patients (2013). Follow AAKP on social media at [@kidneypatient](#) on Facebook, [@kidneypatients](#) on Twitter, and [@kidneypatients](#) on Instagram, and visit www.aakp.org for more information.

About the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences: Founded in 1824, the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS) was the first medical school in the nation's capital and is the 11th oldest in the country. Working together in our nation's capital with integrity and resolve, the GW SMHS is committed to improving the health and well-being of our local, national, and global communities. Visit their website at smhs.gwu.edu.