

# 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Summit on Kidney Disease Innovations

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Remarks Upon the Presentation of the Global Kidney Leadership & Innovation Award to  
The Honorable Alex M. Azar, II

*Former Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Humans Services (2018-2021)*

5<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Summit on Kidney Disease Innovations

The American Association of Kidney Patients and the George Washington University School of Medicine and  
Health Sciences  
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Washington, DC

That was an excellent presentation from the world health organization and our allied patient partner Joab Wako in Kenya. I think it is tremendous the WHO chose the Global Summit to highlight their publications as a strong example of how patients around the world can influence the health policies and innovations that impact their lives.

I'd now like turn our attention to our next session, advancing the Decade of the Kidney™: Global Leadership in Patient-Centered Policy and Care.

In June 2019, AAKP announced its major initiative – The Decade of the Kidney™.

This marks the time between 2020 and 2030 when kidney patients and their allies across the globe will accelerate greater innovations in disease prevention and treatment.

Our goals have been very clear. We fully intend to transform status quo kidney care and its associated high mortality and high costs to patients and society. Our vision is to move toward a future that incorporates patient insights, ensures wider care choice, and produces targeted therapies that inhibit and cure kidney diseases. We believe closer collaborations among patients, researchers and private industry will lead to therapies that prevent organ failure, increase the long-term outcomes of donated organs, and bring about artificial kidneys.

Some have asked where AAKP gained the confidence to declare this The Decade of the Kidney. That answer is easy. Our confidence comes from our legacy of working alongside public leaders whose understanding of people with chronic disease, and personal courage to push policies that foster innovation, has helped transform health and save lives.

50 years ago, the patient founders of AAKP embraced a similar ambitious goal.

Their vision was to provide life-saving kidney dialysis care to every American in kidney failure. They wanted their fellow patients to be healthy enough to get kidney transplants and return to work and their communities.

To achieve this mission, AAKP organized patients nationwide. They worked closely with allies in medicine, academia, and industry. And one of our brave founders dialyzed on the floor of the U.S. Congress – an act that led to the 1972 congressional passage of legislation for dialysis coverage.

Our patient founders had also enlisted the aid of then President Nixon’s budget director – who strongly recommended the president sign the legislation in 1973. This is how modern dialysis in America was created. Our advocacy inspired patients around the world.

That presidential budget director was later promoted to a position where he implemented the dialysis program. You may recognize the name Caspar Weinberger – before he was President Reagan’s defense secretary, he was the 10<sup>th</sup> secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services – or as it was known then – the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

In 2018, the Honorable Alex Azar assumed office as the 24<sup>th</sup> Secretary of Health and Human Services. Secretary Azar shared a vision for transforming outdated kidney care that aligned seamlessly with the long-held interests of patients and the wider kidney stakeholder community. He brought his full expert knowledge of the pharmaceutical industry and past experiences as the deputy secretary of HHS to solve problems.

Upon assuming office, he immediately brought kidney patients, including AAKP advocates, to his conference room to solicit their views and gather their insights – a practice he maintained throughout his tenure. In just a few short years, Secretary Azar cleared obstacles and launched initiatives that boldly challenged outdated thinking. He clearly led the way for patient-centered kidney medicine through new payment models that emphasized early intervention, timely treatments, and greater opportunities for kidney transplants. He promoted innovations, including artificial organs.

In July 2019, almost exactly four years ago, the Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health was issued. This historic document included the patient-centered policies championed and led by Secretary Azar. The Executive Order signaled a new chapter in American kidney health – and inspired patients across the globe to unite and push for similar changes in their own countries.

Before his term ended – kidney transplant patients were protected from the loss of transplant drug coverage by the inclusion of lifetime coverage in the final 2020 budget agreement. This was a 20-year goal of the kidney community. It was accomplished under Secretary Azar.

It is my great honor, on this 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Global Summit to celebrate the man behind the effort – our 24<sup>th</sup> Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – the Honorable Secretary Alexander Azar with AAKP’s Inaugural Global Kidney Leadership and Innovation Award!

Before we welcome Secretary Azar, I’d like to ask Dr. Raj – as Summit Co-Chair, say a word on behalf of the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences

Thank you, Dr. Raj!

Secretary Azar.

The award is presented, “For the courage to transform the global narrative of kidney disease and status quo care through principled policy, innovation, care choice, and patient-centered medicine.”

Congratulations Secretary Azar, we’d be honored to have you share some remarks.

Thank you again Secretary.

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