



Protect, Prevent, Live Well

September 23, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus,

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals and advocates in the world dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of the public and our communities, I write to thank you for your work in crafting the America's Healthy Future Act. We believe your proposal makes a number of positive steps in expanding and improving health coverage for both uninsured and underinsured Americans.

We are pleased with several provisions contained in your proposal, including provisions to:

- Provide annual “wellness visits” for Medicare participants and their doctors to focus on prevention
- Eliminate out-of-pocket costs for screening and prevention services in Medicare
- Increase graduate medical education training positions with priority given to increasing training in primary care

At the same time, there are a number of areas of concern in the proposal as well. APHA is particularly concerned about the following issues in your proposal:

- Insufficient subsidies targeted at low- and moderate-income individuals and families to assist with the cost of health insurance premiums.
- No provision to close the so-called “doughnut-hole” coverage gap in the Medicare Part D program.
- Excessively high age-rating for older Americans. We are concerned that the legislation would allow insurers to charge older Americans 5 times as much for premiums than for younger people.
- No provision to provide for a “public option” for health insurance coverage to compete with private insurance plans. The bill currently contains a provision for the development of a “CO-OP” plan, a nonprofit consumer-owned entity to compete with private insurance companies. APHA believes that the CO-OP plan is unlikely to adequately provide lower-cost health care options. Instead APHA supports the creation of a true public option that would provide a competitive and affordable alternative for consumers.

We understand that there may be a number of amendments offered during the Finance Committee's consideration to remedy the issues highlighted above and we ask for your support should they be offered. We thank you again for your continued work to improve the health of all Americans. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Senate and House to advance the best possible health reform legislation this year.

Sincerely,

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (E)
Executive Director