



c/o Community Health Councils, Inc  
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October 9, 2009

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

The undersigned members and supporters of the National Health Equity Coalition (NHEC), a policy and advocacy network committed to the elimination of racial and ethnic health disparities and the achievement of health equity, urge your support for health reform and critical provisions that would prevent and reduce health disparities.

Inequalities in health status and health care exact a huge human and economic toll on the nation. Their persistence means that millions of Americans and their families suffer needlessly from a disproportionately higher burden of illness and mortality. With projections indicating that nearly 1 in 2 people living in the U.S. by mid-century will be a person of color, our nation's health status clearly depends on our ability to improve the health of our fastest-growing communities.

A priority of health reform legislation must be to eliminate disparities and achieve health equity. Critical provisions are included in the Affordable Health Choices Act that are in-line with recommendations NHEC provided earlier this year. We urge you to support and do everything you can to ensure the following provisions are preserved as the bill moves through the legislative process:

1. Sections 171, 312 and 428 expand federally qualified health centers, school-based health clinics and nurse-managed health care and wellness services in medically underserved areas, respectively, which are important parts of our traditional health safety-net.
2. Section 185 and 443 improve enrollment of eligible individuals in public health insurance programs by establishing health information technology enrollment standards and funding community health workers to provide outreach and education regarding enrollment, respectively.
3. Section 212 increases access to medical homes by establishing grants for community health teams to implement patient-centered medical homes and help primary care practices coordinate and improve quality of care.
4. Section 321 expands effective community-based approaches to preventing and reducing health disparities by providing state and local governments and community-based organizations community transformation grants to improve opportunities for physical activity, eating nutritious foods, smoking cessation, and healthy living.
5. Sections 451 through 454 reauthorize and expand effective programs that improve the diversity and distribution of the health workforce, including the Centers of Excellence, Health Careers Opportunity Program, Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students, Faculty Loan Repayment and Fellowships, Area Health Education Centers, and Nursing Workforce Diversity Program.
6. Section 437 improves cultural competence among health professionals by requiring the development of model curricula for cultural competence and public health competence to be used in health professions schools and continuing education programs.

7. Section 332 ensures data collection on health disparities by requiring all federally conducted or supported programs to collect and report data on race, ethnicity, primary language, socioeconomic status, geography, and other demographic factors using standardized measures.
8. Section 219 reduces disparities in the effectiveness of medical treatments by establishing the Center for Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation to conduct research on health outcomes and the effectiveness and appropriateness of health care and behavioral health services.
9. Section 333 increases the use of health impact assessments to determine the potential effects of a policy or program on the public's health by disseminating best practices and providing capacity building grants, technical assistance and training.
10. Section 301 improves interagency coordination on public health activities by establishing the National Prevention, Health Promotion and Public Health Council and requiring the council to develop a National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy. However, we recommend that eliminating health disparities be specifically mentioned as a goal of the council and the national strategy.

We are also very pleased with efforts by the Finance Committee to address health disparities, including provisions in the chairman's mark of the America's Healthy Futures Act that do the following:

1. Improve and require data collection on the race, ethnicity and primary language of Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries in order to better identify disparities in access to and quality of health care services.
2. Require a national quality improvement strategy with priorities to improve the nation's health and health care services, including reducing health disparities.
3. Develop a national workforce strategy to recruit, train and retain a health workforce that meets the nation's current and future health care needs, including the needs of minorities and other medically underserved populations.
4. Expand programs that conduct outreach and education related to Medicare low-income assistance programs.
5. Establishes a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to support and disseminate research on the effectiveness of health care services while considering potential differences among racial and ethnic minorities and other subpopulations.
6. Requires each hospital to conduct a community health needs assessment and develop a strategy to meet the community's needs.

We greatly appreciate efforts to include these critical provisions in health reform legislation and urge your strong support for their retention in the final health reform legislation. Please feel free to contact us at any time. We look forward to working with you on this and other health equity issues this year.

Sincerely,

AARP  
AIDS Action Council  
American Academy of Nurse Practitioners  
American Academy of Nursing  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Academy of Physician Assistants  
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)  
American Dental Education Association

American Medical Student Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Optometric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved  
Association of Minority Health Professions Schools  
Association of Schools of Public Health  
Black Women for Wellness  
Black Women's Health Imperative  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Bronx Health REACH / NY CEED  
Brooklyn Perinatal Network, Inc.  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network  
CANN - Community Access National Network  
The Center for HIV Law & Policy  
Charles Drew University of Medicine & Science  
CommonHealth ACTION  
Community Catalyst  
Community Health Councils, Inc.  
DeVany Industrial Consultants  
The Disparities Solutions Center at Massachusetts General Hospital  
Families USA  
Family Voices  
Food for the World, Inc.  
HIVictorious, Inc. Madison, WI  
HIV Medicine Association  
Ke Ali`i Maka`ainana Hawaiian Civic Club of Washington, D.C.  
Khmer Health Advocates  
La Fe Policy Research and Education Center  
Latino CEED: REACH New England  
Legal Voice (formerly Northwest Women's Law Center)  
Meharry Medical College  
Morehouse School of Medicine  
National AHEC Organization  
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors  
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care  
National Association of Local Boards of Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council on Diversity in the Health Professions  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Episcopal AIDS Coalition  
National Health Law Program (NHeLP)  
National Hispanic Health Foundation  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National League for Nursing  
National Network of Abortion Funds.  
National Physicians Alliance  
Northwest Federation of Community Organizations  
Out of Many, One  
Public Health - Seattle & King County  
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need

Seattle & King County REACH Coalition  
Society for Public Health Education  
Society of General Internal Medicine  
Trust for America's Health  
YMCA of Greater Cleveland

Cc: The Honorable Barack Obama