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October 9, 2009

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

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. We are very pleased that the America's Affordable Health Choices Act (H.R. 3200) prioritizes addressing health disparities throughout the legislation. In addition, critical provisions are included 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 2101 and 2511 expand community health centers and school-based health clinics, respectively, which are important parts of our traditional health safety-net.
2. Sections 1302 and 1722 increase access to medical homes by establishing pilot programs in Medicare and Medicaid/CHIP, respectively, that support clinical and community-based medical home services. In addition, section 2252 supports training programs for health professionals in interdisciplinary care and coordination.
3. Section 2301 establishes a Prevention and Wellness Trust to ensure sustainable funding for the implementation of a National Prevention and Wellness Strategy. The strategy shall include identification of specific national priorities and goals for prevention and wellness, including those specific to reducing health disparities. In particular, this section supports Health Empowerment Zones consisting of cooperative partnerships between public health departments and communities to implement prevention and wellness strategies specifically targeting health disparities.
4. Sections 2241, 2242 and 2281 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, and Nursing Workforce Diversity Program. In addition, sections 2261 and 2271 require data collection and analysis on the health workforce to determine deficiencies in its supply, diversity and distribution.

5. Section 2251 establishes grants to support cultural and linguistic competency training programs for health professionals and research on the most effective models of cultural and linguistic competency training.
6. Sections 1221, 1222 and 1223 improve access to care for Medicare beneficiaries with limited English proficiency by requiring a study on the effectiveness and utilization of Medicare payments for language services, establishing a demonstration program that provides grants to Medicare service providers to provide competent interpreter or translation services at no additional cost, and requiring the Institute of Medicine to report on the impact of language access services on the health and health care of limited English proficient populations, respectively.
7. Section 2402 requires standards for data collection and analysis on key indicators of the nation's health and performance of the health care system, including data on health disparities and by demographic characteristics like race, ethnicity and primary language.
8. Section 1401 establishes a Comparative Effectiveness Research Commission to support and disseminate research on the effectiveness of health care services while considering potential differences among racial and ethnic minorities and other subpopulations.

We greatly appreciate efforts to include these critical provisions in H.R. 3200 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.
HCAN – Health Care for America Now
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