



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

May 15, 2019

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 201515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to urge you to support H.R. 987, the Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act, when it comes to the House floor for a vote later this week. This bill would strengthen access to comprehensive and affordable health care, providing more Americans with the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives.

The Affordable Care Act led to historic gains in the number of Americans with access to comprehensive health insurance coverage. However, recent actions by the administration threaten to weaken many of the important provisions of the ACA. Last August, the administration finalized a rule that allowed for greater use and promotion of short-term health plans. These plans are not subject to the ACA's consumer protections including protections for people with pre-existing conditions and the requirement that plans cover essential health benefits such as maternity care, prescription drugs and substance use disorder services. H.R. 987 would rescind the administration's rule and protect consumers from inadequate health coverage.

H.R. 987 also includes provisions to reinstate funding for consumer outreach, educational assistance, and the navigator program. A recent study from the Commonwealth Fund found that 40% of America's uninsured adults were not aware of their health coverage options through the marketplaces. Health care coverage can be complicated and overwhelming, and outreach and advertising efforts help individuals understand their options. The Trump administration's drastic cuts to this funding created yet another obstacle to enrollment in an already complicated process. Making consumers aware of their coverage options can positively impact enrollment and helps consumers select a health coverage plan that best meets their health care needs and financial constraints. Restoring funding for outreach and enrollment activities is a key component of reducing the number of people without health insurance.

This legislation would further improve enrollment and consumer choice by providing states with funding to establish their own marketplaces. The bill would grant states the flexibility to transition from the federal exchange to their own state-based health exchanges, which would allow states to offer options tailored to their population's needs and to control their own enrollment period.

H.R. 987 also includes important provisions to make prescription drugs more accessible and affordable. This legislation would end the tactics used by drug manufacturers to keep less expensive generic drugs off the market. This is a critical step toward lowering the cost of prescription drugs and reducing the number of individuals who cannot afford their prescriptions.

Ensuring access to comprehensive and affordable health coverage and services is a top priority for APHA. We are encouraged by this legislation and the improvements it would put in place to enhance consumer awareness and increase access to health coverage that best meets their needs. We urge all members of the House to support this legislation.

Thank you for your attention to our views on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" and "B".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director