

November 19, 2008

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Chairman Edward Kennedy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Ranking Member Michael Enzi
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Chairman Max Baucus
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Ranking Member Charles Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 200510

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

House Minority Leader John Boehner
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman John Dingell
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Joe Barton
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Charles Rangel
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman George Miller
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Buck McKeon
United States House of Representative
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressional Leaders, Committee Chairs and Ranking Members:

Our nation is in a period of unprecedented economic uncertainty, and the current financial crisis threatens to depress economic growth for a prolonged period of time and lead to hardship for families and businesses, while government budgets will be under stress. The new Congress and President must get our economy back on track and that depends on addressing health care.

We, a diverse group of organizations representing tens of millions of Americans, urge you to include meaningful health care reform as one of the first domestic priorities of the 111th Congress. We stand ready to support the Congress and President in national reform efforts to address our health care crisis.

We cannot afford to delay identifying and implementing solutions to the disturbing health care trends that undermine the economic security of our families, limit the productivity of our

workforce, inhibit job creation and wage growth, and threaten to crowd out investments in energy, education, and infrastructure.

Those trends are well known to most Americans. Between 2000 and 2007, family premiums for employer-provided coverage rose 5.4 times faster than median worker earnings. Year after year, health care costs grow at a rate that outpaces our overall economic and wage growth. Health care expenses drive families into debt; nearly half of foreclosures were caused at least in part by a medical problem. Families forgo necessary care and jeopardize the health and productivity of the next generation of American students and workers. Each year we spend more on health care, yet our spending is not improving the health status of millions of Americans.

Over the last 20 years, whether the economy was growing or contracting, the number of Americans without quality health insurance continued to climb. The undersigned organizations share a common understanding that expanded coverage is an integral component of a comprehensive solution to contain health care costs and improve health outcomes.

We stand ready to support you in a national conversation to fix health care, to focus on prevention and chronic care, to give patients more tools to manage their health, to give all Americans meaningful coverage, and build a more sustainable health care system that consistently delivers value to all of us, and that strengthens us as a nation. We pledge our support for such a conversation as well as an early effort to secure meaningful health care reform.

Sincerely,

AARP

Alzheimer's Association

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Academy of Physician Assistants

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association of Nurse Anesthetists

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American Dental Education Association

American Diabetes Association

American Heart Association

American Medical Women's Association

American Network of Community Options and Resources

American Nurses Association

American Optometric Association

American Psychiatric Administration

American Psychological Association

American Public Health Association

American Stroke Association

Ascension Health

Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association for Community Affiliated Plans

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs

Association of periOperative Registered Nurses

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Bazon Center for Mental Health Law

Breast Cancer Network of Strength

Campaign for Mental Health Reform

Catholic Health Association of the United States

Catholic Health Initiatives

Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

Center for Science in the Public Interest

CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children's Defense Fund

Child Welfare League of America

Coalition on Human Needs

Community Catalyst

Consumer Action

Consumers Union

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Easter Seals

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Families USA

Family Voices

Health Care For America Now (HCAN)

Herndon Alliance

HIV Medicine Association

Huntington's Disease Society of America

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Legal Action Center

Lutheran Services in America

Mental Health America

Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF)

National Academies of Practice

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Home Care and Hospice

National Association of Community Health Centers

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems

National Association of School Nurses

National Association of Social Workers

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

The National Beauty Culturists' League Incorporated

National Coalition on Health Care

National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

National Consumers League

National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of La Raza

National Council on Aging

National Education Association

National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association

National Health Council

National Health Law Program (NHeLP)

National Hemophilia Foundation

National Medical Association

National Partnership for Women and Families

National Respite Coalition

National Senior Citizens Law Center

National Women's Health Network

National Women's Law Center

NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Patient Privacy Rights

PHI Health Care for Health Care Workers Campaign

PICO National Network

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Project Inform

Raising Women's Voices

Research!America

Service Employees International Union

Small Business Majority

State Associations of Addiction Services

United Jewish Communities

United Spinal Association

USAction

U.S. Public Interest Research Group

Voice of the Retarded

Women of Reform Judaism