

HIV Health Care Access Working Group

November 6, 2009

Dear Members of the House of Representatives:

We are writing on behalf of the HIV Health Care Access Working Group ("HCAWG") to offer our support for the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962). HCAWG is a coalition of more than 100 national and community-based AIDS service organizations representing HIV medical providers, advocates and people living with HIV/AIDS and providing critical HIV-related health care and support services. The Working Group is actively engaged in efforts to increase early and affordable access to quality, comprehensive care and prevention services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

For the fight against HIV/AIDS, nothing could be more urgent than comprehensive reform of our nation's health care system. The vast majority of the 1.1 million Americans living with HIV are low-income and uninsured or under-insured. Adequate coverage is either too expensive or simply denied because of their health status. Hundreds of thousands of low-income workers with HIV are trapped in a health care Catch-22: considered too "wealthy" and healthy for Medicaid, but too poor to afford private coverage. Those who do qualify for government assistance often face obstacles to getting the care they need within Medicaid and Medicare. For instance, many doctors won't accept Medicaid, and essential services such as oral health, substance abuse and mental health treatment remain out of reach. Medicare beneficiaries must pay high out-of-pocket costs or face harmful treatment interruptions. People living with HIV/AIDS need healthcare coverage they can count on and plans that will not dis-enroll them when they need assistance the most. They need affordable out-of-pocket costs and a simple application process.

For all of these reasons, we strongly endorse the approach to national health care reform in H.R. 3962 and urge you to support the bill's final passage. We are particularly thankful that the bill includes a provision giving states the option to immediately provide Medicaid coverage to people with living with HIV who have not progressed to full-blown AIDS, and another to include AIDS Drug Assistance Program expenditures in the calculation of True-Out-of-Pocket expenses in the Medicare Part D program. Other elements in the bill that are particularly important to improving access to comprehensive care for people with HIV include:

- the public health insurance option
- Medicaid coverage for individuals and families with income up to 150% of the federal poverty level
- the prohibition of discrimination based on health status in the private insurance market
- the premium credits, cost-sharing subsidies, and significantly-strengthened cost-sharing limits that will keep health insurance accessible to and affordable for low-income individuals and families
- the phase-out of the Medicare Part D coverage gap by 2019
- investments to strengthen the clinical workforce, address prevention and wellness, and reduce health disparities

We thank you for your efforts to improve the nation's health care system, and urge you to support the Affordable Health Care for America Act as introduced.

Sincerely,

The HIV Health Care Access Working Group Steering Committee (listed below)

AIDS Action
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
The AIDS Institute
AIDS Project Los Angeles
AIDS Treatment Data Network
American Academy of HIV Medicine
Broward House
Community Access National Network
Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project
Gay Men's Health Crisis
Health and Disability Advocates
HIV Medicine Association
HIVictorious, Inc.
Housing Works
National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Association of People With AIDS
National Minority AIDS Council
Okaloosa AIDS Support and Informational Services, Inc.
Project Inform
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
South Carolina Campaign to End AIDS
Treatment Access Expansion Project
Village Care of New York