

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 11, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel  
Chairman  
Committee on Ways and Means  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

## **Prevention and Wellness: An Essential Component of Health Care Reform Legislation**

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, and Chairmen Rangel, Waxman, and Miller:

As the House- and Senate-passed health care bills are reconciled, we write you to request that the final legislation include a strong emphasis on prevention and wellness. Preventing the development of debilitating and expensive diseases – which cause poor quality of life and drive up health care costs – must be at the heart of our work to reform the healthcare system. Specifically, we urge that the final legislation require state Medicaid programs to cover tobacco cessation services and all other recommended preventive services contained in the House bill, including individuals who are newly eligible for Medicaid due to the program's expansion under the health care bills.

As you know, Section 1712 of H.R. 3962, the House-passed Affordable Health Care for America Act, would extend tobacco cessation coverage to all Medicaid recipients; however, the Senate's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act limits cessation coverage to pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid – leaving millions of smokers who want to quit without the help they need to do so. We strongly support the inclusion of the House language in the conference report.

In the last few weeks, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Oregonian*, the *Syracuse (NY) Post-Standard*, the *Anchorage Daily News* and the *Springfield (MA) Republican* editorialized about the need for the final bill to require all state Medicaid programs to include comprehensive tobacco cessation services. The editorials urge Congress to include this fundamental health and wellness provision.

Presently the treatment of chronic disease consumes 75 percent of all health care dollars in the United States. We believe the final health care reform legislation must ensure all Americans, especially our most vulnerable citizens, have affordable access to preventive services so that we can begin to reduce the incidence of diseases rather than just treat them. Comprehensive tobacco cessation services have been proven to increase the likelihood that a smoker will successfully quit. Recognizing that quitting smoking is the single most important thing that individuals can do to improve their health, tobacco cessation receives an “A” grade from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

Tobacco products are used by over 45 million Americans, and tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year tobacco use kills over 400,000 Americans and costs the nation almost \$100 billion in health care expenditures. Tobacco use causes approximately one-third of all cancer deaths, 20 percent of coronary heart disease deaths and over 80 percent of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema, chronic bronchitis) deaths. Medicaid patients and uninsured Americans are even more likely to smoke than the general adult population: 33 percent of adult Medicaid recipients smoke compared to 20 percent of the general population. The resulting financial toll on states is tremendous: It has been estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that 11 percent of total Medicaid expenditures, or more than \$22 billion a year, can be attributed to smoking-related illness.

Tobacco’s human and economic costs highlight how important it is to include prevention and wellness measures in the final health care bill, especially for the Medicaid population. In 2006, the National Commission on Prevention Priorities released a ranking of the effectiveness of 25 preventive services. Smoking cessation scored as one of the top three services (along with immunizations and daily aspirin) for preventing health consequences and for cost effectiveness. In 2009, Massachusetts released a study which found smoking rates among its Medicaid population declined by 26 percent after the state’s Medicaid program implemented its comprehensive cessation benefit in 2006. This decline is dramatic, particularly when compared to CDC data indicating that between 2004 and 2009 national smoking prevalence only decreased from 20.9 to 20.6 percent. Moreover, there were fewer visits to emergency rooms for asthma attacks, hospitalizations for heart attacks declined and adverse maternal health complications also dropped.

Prevention and wellness provisions – especially coverage for comprehensive tobacco cessation services in all state Medicaid programs – would significantly improve our nation’s physical and fiscal health. Accordingly, we fully support their inclusion in this historic health care legislation. Thank you for your extraordinary leadership on the health care bill. We appreciate your consideration of our request. Preventing disease, reducing healthcare costs and ensuring that Americans live longer, healthier lives is a necessary step to remedying our “sick care” system.

Sincerely,

Aimee DeYette

Edward G. Markey

Hayd Doggett

John Lewis

Aimee Van Allen

John M. Shutz

Rail M. Grayson

John W. Oliver

Jane Hamu

Tammy Baldwin

David Brooks in Can

[Signature]

Diana DeGette  
Edward J. Markey  
John Lewis  
Tammy Baldwin  
Donna Christensen  
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Raúl Grijalva  
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Jesse Jackson, Jr.  
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