



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
For science. For action. For health.

June 16, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to express our deep concern about the reported efforts in the U.S. Senate to draft legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act behind closed doors and without adequate review or input from the public or leading health and public health experts. We strongly opposed the American Health Care Act of 2017, legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in early May. We believe that the House-passed legislation does nothing to improve the health of the American public and would have a significant negative impact on the health of all Americans, especially the most vulnerable. We welcome the opportunity to work with both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate to build upon the ACA to further improve the health of the nation.

According to the Congressional Budget Office analysis, the AHCA would result in 23 million Americans losing health insurance coverage by 2026, taking the uninsured rate up to a staggering 51 million, nearly double the number of Americans who would lack insurance under existing law. The bill would cut critical premium subsidies for low- and moderate-income families and phase out the ACA's Medicaid expansion. Under the House bill, many, especially low-income and older Americans, would pay higher premiums, receive lower subsidies and be subject to higher out-of-pocket costs, including higher deductibles and co-pays for plans that provide less coverage. Health insurance coverage is critical to preventing disease, ensuring health and well-being and driving down the use of costlier providers of care.

The AHCA would allow states to opt-out of requiring health plans to cover 10 essential health benefits such as maternity care, mental health and substance abuse disorder services and prescription drug coverage. This would likely lead to higher out-of-pocket costs and plans with extremely limited coverage. It would also allow insurers to charge significantly higher premiums for people with pre-existing conditions. The addition of a mere \$8 billion over five years included in the House bill will do little to help people with pre-existing conditions who could see drastically higher premiums leaving millions in the individual and small group market with no protections from insurer discrimination.

The AHCA would also eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund, the first and only mandatory funding stream specifically dedicated to public health and prevention activities. The fund

has already provided more than \$6 billion to support a variety of public health activities in every state including tracking and preventing infectious diseases like the Ebola and Zika viruses, community and clinical prevention programs, preventing childhood lead poisoning and expanding access to childhood immunizations. Eliminating the fund would devastate the budget of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The fund currently makes up 12 percent of CDC's budget and eliminating this funding stream would force Congress to replace the funding through the regular appropriations process where resources for nondefense discretionary programs are already too low.

Not only would the AHCA phase out the Medicaid expansion under the ACA, it would also make other troubling changes to the Medicaid program, converting it to a per capita program. CBO estimates the bill would cut federal spending on Medicaid by \$834 billion over the next decade, drastically cutting resources to states, many of which are already struggling with tight budgets, putting the health of the most vulnerable Americans at risk. The bill would also block Medicaid reimbursements to Planned Parenthood for one year – which CBO estimates will lead to less access to care, more unintended births and more costs for the Medicaid program.

While the Affordable Care Act is not perfect, the law has made progress in addressing the biggest challenges facing our health system including uneven quality of care, deaths due to medical errors, discriminatory practices by health insurance providers and the shrinking ranks of the nation's primary care providers. The ACA has made progress in shifting our health system from one that focuses on treating the sick to one that focuses on keeping people healthy. We ask you to end the closed process currently being used to develop Senate legislation and to reject the many unacceptable provisions contained in the AHCA, or any similar provisions that would lead to less coverage and access to critical services, higher costs to consumers and less funding for critical public health and prevention programs. Instead, we urge you to work in a bipartisan manner to improve and build upon the successes of the ACA and work to provide health insurance coverage to the more than 28 million currently uninsured Americans. We look forward to working with you to create the healthiest nation in one generation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent part.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director

Cc: Senate Finance Committee
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee