

Call for Health Equity to Members of the 116th Congress

January 4, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

Each year our nation loses \$93 billion in avoidable health care costs and \$175 billion due to premature deaths stemming directly from racial, ethnic, and other health inequities. Each of these dollars has a human story behind it, such as an African American sickle cell patient encountering bias and discrimination in the Emergency Department, a person with disabilities being unable to find a qualified physician with accessible facilities in her neighborhood, or parents being unable to communicate with their child's doctor because of a language barrier.

Therefore, as organizations committed to achieving health equity for all, we call on Congress to take immediate action to ensure that each person in the United States has the opportunity to attain their full health potential. This mission unites our diverse organizations and is the shared goal of millions of health and social justice advocates, patients, and providers across the country.

We believe improving access to care, quality of care, and individual- and population-level outcomes is impossible unless we directly address the intersecting structural, social and economic factors that influence health. These factors include racism and other forms of systematic oppression, that perpetuate health inequities based on people's age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, language, immigration status and socioeconomic status. Members of Congress must actively work to pass legislation, such as the Health Equity and Accountability Act, that directly targets the factors that underlie health inequities. Congress must also use its oversight authority to help ensure that our government succeeds in the goal of eliminating racial, ethnic, and other health inequities.

Specifically, we request that you:

- 1. Center the needs of racial and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable and underserved populations in all health legislation:** All bills addressing health issues must account for the needs of communities that experience inequities. As Congress tackles health care quality, access, and cost, it must invite input and knowledge from a wide diversity of voices. Policy design, funding priorities, and program implementation must be informed by and explicitly tackle the day-to-day barriers people experiencing health inequities face, including racism and other social and economic determinants of health. At the same time, we must continue to work to develop a health system that values the individual patient and seeks to improve each person's experience of care and their health outcomes.
- 2. Protect and build on federally-funded health insurance programs and assistance for safety net providers:** Congress must defend and strengthen the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, Medicare, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, which collectively provide coverage for over 117 million Americans. It must oppose any legislation or administrative actions, including budget cuts and discriminatory policy riders, that run counter to the purpose of these programs. In addition, Congress must support our nation's safety net providers, such as community health centers, rural health clinics, community

mental health centers, tribal and urban Indian health programs, safety-net hospitals, reproductive health centers, and community-based providers, to ensure access to high quality and affordable care.

- 3. Provide oversight to ensure the government is fulfilling its obligations to ensure equal access to health care for all:** We are deeply disturbed by numerous recent actions the current administration has taken, including prioritizing religious exemptions over civil rights in the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services; attacking immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; cutting funding for vital insurance coverage enrollment outreach; seeking to dismantle nondiscrimination protections for transgender individuals; and signaling its contempt for the needs of people of color and other vulnerable groups throughout its policymaking and strategic planning activities. Members of Congress must use their oversight powers to hold administration officials accountable for these and other actions that harm our collective efforts to achieve a healthier nation for all.

None of us—not our organizations and certainly not our elected lawmakers—can afford to stand by and watch while millions of people struggle to get the health care they need, when they need it. All of us – no matter who we are and where we live—are members of families, communities, and the fabric of our nation. Congress must act to make health equity not only a priority, but a reality for all.

Sincerely

Action on Smoking and Health

Advocates for Youth

African American Ministers In Action

AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families

American Association of Birth Centers

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American Federation of Teachers

American Kidney Fund

American Muslim Health Professionals

American Public Health Association

APLA Health

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Asian Services in Action, Inc. (ASIA)

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Black Womens Health Imperative

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

Caring Across Generations

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

Center for Public Representation
Center for Reproductive Rights
Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
Community Catalyst
Community Health Councils
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Consumer Health First
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Equality California
Faith in Action
Faith That Heals TN Conference, United Methodists Church
Families USA
Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
First Focus Campaign for Children
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Impetus - Let's Get Started LLC
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Khmer Health Advocates, Inc
Kids Forward
Lanai Community Health Center
Latino Commission on AIDS
Mental Health America
Mi Familia Vota
Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project
MomsRising
NAPAFASA
NASTAD
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Certified Professional Midwives (NACPM)
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Collaborative for Health Equity
National Consumers League
National Disability Rights Network

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Health Law Program (NHeLP)
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Minority Quality Forum
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Patient Advocate Foundation
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
National Women's Health Network
National Working Positive Coalition
NMAC
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Prevention Institute
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
RESULTS
Roots Community Health Center
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Street Level Health Project
The Center for Health Innovation - NM Public Health Institute
The Coalition for Disability Health Equity
The Latino Health Insurance Program, Inc.
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Praxis Project
The United Methodist Church - The General Board of Church and Society
Treatment Action Group (TAG)
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
UNITED SIKHS
Young Invincibles
YWCA USA