



CONSUMERS F1RST

The Alliance to Make the Health Care
System Work for Everyone

September 24, 2019

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

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

The undersigned organizations, representing health care consumers and children, primary care physicians, health care providers, labor, employers, and other stakeholders, are writing to express our support for the bipartisan *Lower Health Care Costs Act*, as reported by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) on June 26. *Consumers First* is a new alliance of organizations focused on advancing policies that uproot the fundamental economic distortions in the health care system. We work to ensure that the nation's health care system finally fulfills its obligation to the people it serves by providing affordable, high-quality, cost-effective care to everyone.

The *Lower Health Care Costs Act* represents the most significant legislation focused on health care cost and value in many years. *Consumers First* commends the Senate HELP Committee on the release of the legislation and appreciates Chairman Alexander's and Ranking Member Murray's leadership in bringing attention to rising consumer health care costs. The cost of American health care is a profound economic and public health problem: 44 percent of the public report not seeing a doctor when they need to because the costs are too high; 30 percent say the cost of medical care interferes with basic needs like food, housing, and heat; and nearly two-thirds believe that, as a country, we do not get good value from our health care systemⁱ. High health care costs are also a significant problem for employers and working people; between 1999 and 2016, the total cost of a family employer-sponsored health insurance plan rose from \$5,791 to \$18,142 in real 2016 dollars^{ii, iii}.

The *Lower Health Care Costs Act* is a significant effort to reform the health care system and is a robust down payment on future reforms. We strongly support the aims of the legislation, including efforts to protect patients from surprise out-of-network bills; measures that lay a foundation of federal reforms on prescription drug costs; increasing competition, transparency and the flow of data in the health care system; and the emphasis on needed improvements in public health. This is a critical moment for lawmakers to begin to truly move the needle forward to lower health care costs and improve the quality of care for America's families, children, seniors, and adults.

The *Lower Health Care Costs Act* is an important step in increasing access to affordable, high quality health care for everyone. We urge the full Senate to finalize this legislation this year. We look forward to working with you on further efforts to lower consumer health care costs and expand health care value.

Sincerely,

Consumers First Steering Committee

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Benefits Council

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

Families USA

First Focus Campaign for Children

Pacific Business Group on Health

Supporting Organizations

American Medical Student Association

American Muslim Health Professionals

American Public Health Association

Caring Across Generations

Mental Health America

MomsRising

National Partnership for Women & Families

The Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander
The Honorable Patty Murray

ⁱ NORC at the University of Chicago and West Health Institute, *Americans' Views of Healthcare Costs, Coverage, and Policy*, March 2018,

<http://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI%20Healthcare%20Costs%20Coverage%20and%20Policy/WHI%20Healthcare%20Costs%20Coverage%20and%20Policy%20Issue%20Brief.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Due to inflation, the dollar's purchasing power changes over time. To compare dollar values year over year, the values must be converted from nominal or current values to constant, or real, dollar values. Health care spending in the United States has increased nearly sixfold, from \$1,797 per person in 1970 to \$10,348 in 2016 using constant 2017 dollars.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rabah Kamal and Cynthia Cox, "How Has U.S. Spending on Healthcare Changed Over Time?," Peterson-Kaiser Health System Tracker, December 10, 2018, https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/u-s-spending-healthcare-changed-time/#itemhealth-spending-growth-has-outpaced-growth-of-the-u-seconomy_2017.