

Mary H. Partridge
Chair

November 24, 2009

H. James Gooden
Chair-elect

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate

Stephen J. Nolan, Esq.
Past-Chair

Washington, DC 20515

Christine L. Bryant
Secretary/Treasurer

Dear Leader Reid:

Arthur A. Cerullo, JD
Speaker
Nationwide Assembly

As the U.S. Senate continues its discussion on health care reform, I wanted to take this opportunity to reiterate the American Lung Association's strong support for legislation that emphasizes prevention and wellness, includes comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation measures, and eliminates the premium rating for tobacco users.

Ross P. Lanzafame, Esq.
Speaker-Elect
Nationwide Assembly

Emphasizing Health and Wellness Measures

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Charles D. Connor
President &
Chief Executive Officer

The American Lung Association strongly supports the inclusion of prevention and wellness measures in health care reform legislation. Disease prevention and health promotion must be the foundation of any effective health care reform. By assuring an environment that supports healthy people and placing a high priority on eliminating health disparities, demand for medical care will be reduced.

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The inclusion of multi-faceted policy approaches and the use of evidence-based interventions can yield a generous return for a relatively modest investment. The Lung Association supports providing positive incentives to encourage individuals to be actively engaged in their health care by pursuing recommended screenings and preventive services and by maintaining or improving their health through smoking cessation and other healthy behaviors.

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The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* contains many important wellness and prevention provisions, including grant opportunities for community-based wellness and prevention efforts. Evidence-based community and wellness prevention programs can save lives and money. Indeed, a recent report by the Trust for America's Health estimated that in 2004 dollars, an investment of \$10 per person per year in community prevention programs will save \$2.8 billion annually in 1 to 2 years, and that savings rises to \$18 billion annually in 10 to 20 years.

Saving Lives and Health Care Costs by Helping Smokers Quit

The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* takes significant steps towards reducing the terrible burden caused by tobacco use in the United States. Provisions such as the elimination of cost-sharing for preventive services endorsed by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, Medicaid coverage of tobacco cessation for pregnant women and the elimination of the exclusion of tobacco cessation medications under the Medicaid program are essential to getting smokers the help they need to quit.

However, as introduced, the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* does not include comprehensive cessation benefits for all Medicaid patients. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 36.6 percent of Medicaid recipients smoke, as opposed to 22.6 percent of the total adult population. According to our recent report *Helping Smokers Quit: State Cessation Coverage*, only six states - Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon and Pennsylvania, provide comprehensive coverage for Medicaid recipients. This highlights the urgent need to provide Medicaid recipients with the help they need to quit smoking.

A recent study from Massachusetts confirms the efficacy of providing comprehensive cessation benefits as recommended by the U.S. Public Health Service's Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence guidelines, and the need for such benefits to be included in the final health care bill. In 2006, Massachusetts began providing comprehensive smoking cessation benefits to the approximately 190,000 MassHealth members who smoked.

The study found that in just over two years, 26 percent of MassHealth smokers (33,000 people) quit smoking. There was also a tremendous decline in the utilization of other costly health care services as a result – including fewer hospitalizations for heart attacks, fewer emergency room visits for asthma attacks and a drop in claims for adverse maternal health complications. By providing comprehensive smoking cessation benefits to their Medicaid population, Massachusetts has demonstrated how lives and health care dollars can be saved.

The American Lung Association urges the U.S. Senate to cover comprehensive tobacco cessation benefits for all Medicaid patients in its final health care bill.

Eliminating the Premium Differential for Tobacco Users

The American Lung Association is gravely concerned about the provision in the *Patient Protection and Affordability Act* that would allow insurers to charge premiums 1.5 times greater for tobacco users than for non-tobacco users. While the Senate is to be applauded for its attempt to reduce tobacco use, the Lung Association believes penalties– in the form of higher premiums – for using tobacco will have the opposite

effect and instead serve as a significant barrier to helping smokers quit. We urge the Senate to strike this provision.

By increasing the costs associated with purchasing insurance coverage – perhaps by as much as \$7,000 per family, health insurance will become less accessible for tobacco users and their families. Reducing healthcare coverage would have the greatest impact on the children of smokers. Almost 60 percent of children 3 to 11 years of age, or 22 million, are exposed to secondhand smoke. These children need greater access to health care, as they are at an increased risk for asthma and lower respiratory tract infections.

Rather than decrease access to health care, including cessation services and put the children of smokers at further risk, the Lung Association encourages the U.S. Senate to make comprehensive tobacco cessation services even more available to all Americans. By recognizing tobacco dependence as the chronic disease it is and treating it as such, the *Patient Protection and Affordability Act* could greatly reduce the prevalence of tobacco use, saving lives and money.

The American Lung Association urges the U.S. Senate to work for a final health care bill that includes an emphasis on wellness and prevention, and covers comprehensive cessation benefits for all including all Medicaid recipients. This legislation represents a tremendous opportunity to help all Americans lead healthier lives and have access to quality health care when they need it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Connor", written in a cursive style.

Charles D. Connor
President and CEO

Cc: The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Chris Dodd
The Honorable Tom Harkin