

October 12 , 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Blunt and Cole and Ranking Members Murray and DeLauro:

On behalf of 18 nonpartisan organizations, representing more than one hundred million Americans living with chronic diseases or other major health conditions, we are writing to urge you to adopt the Senate Appropriations Committee's funding levels for outreach and enrollment in marketplace coverage under the Affordable Care Act during the conference on S. 1771 and H.R. 3358, FY 2018 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriation bills. We are alarmed that the House Appropriations Committee bill does not include funding for these purposes. We believe reduced investment in these marketing activities will continue to contribute to the destabilization of the markets and result in higher premiums for enrollees.

In March 2017, our organizations agreed upon a joint set of goals to guide our work on health care reform. We believe that three elements – affordability, accessibility and adequacy of health care coverage – must be incorporated into any proposal to alter the current system and that changes to the existing law must not jeopardize the health care coverage Americans currently enjoy.¹ Unfortunately, the Administration's decision to cut funding for outreach and navigator support – and the lack of funding included in the House Appropriations Committee-approved bill combined with the political turmoil surrounding cost-sharing reduction (CSR) payments and repeal of the Affordable Care Act – will do just that. A report issued by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects lower enrollment in 2018 than in previous years and the CBO cited reduced federal advertising and outreach efforts as a significant factor.

A separate analysis by Covered California released in September, estimated that the potential impact of reduced federal marketing investment could include one million fewer Americans enrolled in health insurance and a 2.6 percent average increase in premiums for the 2019 plan year because of a smaller consumer pool and less healthy risk profile. If the reduced spending were to lead to a 20 percent decline in enrollment, 2.1 million fewer insured Americans would be covered and premiums could increase by 5.3 percent.

¹ Health Care Reform Principles: http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_495416.pdf

States that devote robust resources to marketing, outreach, and enrollment assistance programs experience higher rates of enrollment than those that do not. In addition, making consumers aware of their coverage options can help promote broader participation of healthy individuals to help offset the costs of older, sicker patients.

Health care coverage is complicated and outreach and advertising efforts are essential tools in helping individuals select a plan that works for them. We urge you to adopt the Senate Appropriations Committee's funding level for these activities and to work with the Administration to make certain the funds are spent appropriately.

Sincerely,

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
Arthritis Foundation
Chron's & Colitis Foundation
Consumers Union
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
Epilepsy Foundation
Family Voices
Futures Without Violence
Mended Little Hearts
Muscular Dystrophy Association
National Health Council
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization for Rare Disorders
United Way Worldwide
Volunteers of America
Women Heart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease

CC: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Paul Ryan
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Chuck Schumer