



August 13, 2020

The Honorable Tom Carper
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Carper:

We write in strong support of S. 4524, the Quit Because of COVID-19 Act, legislation that will ensure that all Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollees have access to the full array of evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments at this critical time. COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting communities of color and other vulnerable populations, and a growing body of evidence suggests that tobacco users are at increased risk of severe complications from COVID-19. Smoking rates are particularly high among people enrolled in Medicaid. Helping tobacco users to quit should be a critical component of the nation's efforts to combat this deadly pandemic.

Tobacco use is a key driver of poor health outcomes and health costs for Medicaid. Medicaid enrollees smoke at more than twice the rate of adults with private health insurance, which increases their risk of cancer, heart disease, COPD, diabetes, and other tobacco-caused diseases. In addition to harming health, high rates of tobacco use also lead to higher health care costs. Smoking-related diseases account for approximately \$39 billion in annual Medicaid costs.

With the COVID-19 pandemic currently confronting our nation, there has never been a more important time to help tobacco users to quit. Smoking weakens the immune system and increases the risk of respiratory infections. Many of the underlying health conditions that place individuals at greater risk for severe complications from COVID-19 are often caused by tobacco use. There is also growing evidence that e-cigarette use can harm lung health.

Most tobacco users want to quit, and Medicaid and CHIP enrollees who use tobacco products should have access to treatments that give them the best chance to quit successfully. That is especially true during a pandemic of an infectious disease that primarily attacks the lungs. But while all states provide some level of tobacco cessation coverage for Medicaid enrollees, many state Medicaid programs do not cover all evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments and include barriers, like cost sharing and prior authorization requirements, to accessing coverage. In 2018, only 15 states covered all 7 FDA-approved tobacco cessation medications as well as group and individual cessation counseling, and only two of these states covered all treatments without barriers to access.

Your bill addresses these gaps in coverage by extending comprehensive tobacco cessation coverage to all Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries. It would also reduce barriers to accessing this coverage by eliminating cost sharing and prior authorization requirements and would provide enhanced federal funding to cover the full cost of state outreach campaigns to educate providers and Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries about the benefit.

Expanding coverage of tobacco cessation treatments can pay dividends in terms of improved health and lower health care costs. After Massachusetts expanded its Medicaid tobacco cessation coverage and conducted a campaign to educate Medicaid enrollees and providers about the enhanced coverage, smoking rates among Medicaid recipients decreased from 38 percent to 28 percent over a two-and-a-half-year period. Every dollar the state invested in its Medicaid tobacco cessation benefit and awareness campaign resulted in \$3.12 in health care savings from reduced hospitalizations.

Quitting is one of the most important actions tobacco users can take to improve their health, and Medicaid and CHIP should assist enrollees who want to quit. We applaud you for introducing legislation that would ensure that all Medicaid and CHIP enrollees have barrier-free coverage of evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency and the two years that follow. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association	Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)
Action on Smoking & Health (ASH)	Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council	Black Women's Health Imperative
Allergy & Asthma Network	Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
American Academy of Family Physicians	ClearWay Minnesota
American Academy of Nursing	Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology	Eta Sigma Gamma – National Health Education Honorary
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology	First Focus on Campaign for Children
American Academy of Pediatrics	GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
American Association for Cancer Research	NAACP
American Association for Dental Research	National African American Tobacco Prevention Network
American Association for Respiratory Care	National Alliance for Hispanic Health
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network	National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
American College Health Association	National Association of School Nurses
American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST)	National Association of Secondary School Principals
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists	National Association of Social Workers
American College of Physicians	National Black Nurses Association
American College of Preventive Medicine	National Education Association
American Dental Association	National Hispanic Medical Association
American Heart Association	National Network of Public Health Institutes
American Lung Association	North American Quitline Consortium
American Psychiatric Association	Oncology Nursing Society
American Psychological Association	Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes (PAVe)
American Public Health Association	Public Health Solutions
American Society of Addiction Medicine	Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions
Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights	Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco
Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy (APPEAL)	The Society of State Leaders of Health and Physical Education
Association for Clinical Oncology	The Society of Thoracic Surgeons
Association of Black Cardiologists	Trinity Health
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health	