



THE PARTNERSHIP FOR MEDICAID

October 8, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the Partnership for Medicaid (Partnership), we applaud your leadership and the leadership of your committees to invest in the nation's health care safety net as part of the reconciliation legislation currently under development. The proposed improvements to Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) represent a once in a generation opportunity to stabilize and expand access to health care and long-term services and supports for millions of low-income Americans, from older adults, people with disabilities, children, pregnant and postpartum women, and their families, and many more. We also applaud your recognition of the importance of the social determinants of health and the many initiatives in the legislation that address serious health disparities, particularly in the areas of maternal health and behavioral health.

The Partnership – a nonpartisan, nationwide coalition made up of organizations representing clinicians, health care providers, safety net plans, and counties – appreciates your continued recognition of Medicaid's indispensable role as our nation's health care safety net. The Partnership is grateful for opportunities to engage with Congress to ensure Medicaid remains a lifeline for Americans seeking relief from the hardship caused by COVID-19, as well as into the future as our country pursues sensible policies that stabilize and improve access to care for low-income Americans throughout the country. Since President Johnson and Congress envisioned the creation of Medicaid 56 years ago, the program has continued to grow, covering more than 80.5 million beneficiaries and, when combined with CHIP, more than half of all U.S. children.

The Partnership is united behind a core set of principles; chiefly among these guiding tenets is our commitment to promoting and expanding meaningful health care coverage. Our organization, and the entities we represent, know the importance of access to comprehensive and stable coverage in shaping both individual and community health outcomes. From this perspective, the Partnership appreciates your efforts to ensure that all individuals have access to high-quality health care coverage and supports closing the Medicaid coverage gap for Americans who still lack access to health insurance. Doing so would provide health care coverage for the 2.2 million uninsured adults who cannot qualify for Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace assistance and are ineligible for Medicaid because their states have not yet expanded their Medicaid programs. Closing the coverage gap would increase health insurance coverage and reduce serious racial health disparities. It would improve access to care, good health outcomes, and financial security.

As a coalition committed to strengthening Medicaid, we would urge lawmakers to appropriately replicate Medicaid as it operates today should Congress ultimately pursue proposals to create a federal Medicaid look-alike program. Ensuring comprehensive coverage, sustainable financing, effective administration, and achieving health equity would all be critical components of any proposal to close the Medicaid coverage gap.

The Partnership also strongly supports the inclusion of the bicameral Better Care Better Jobs Act to expand and improve access to Medicaid-funded home- and community-based services (HCBS), a chronically under-resourced sector. Currently, there is a direct care workforce crisis that threatens the very infrastructure of HCBS, putting older adults and individuals with disabilities at increased risk of institutionalization and hospitalization. Without funding to stabilize the workforce, HCBS providers nationwide are being forced to discontinue services and turn away referrals due to insufficient staffing. An increased investment in the HCBS program will enable state Medicaid programs to support access to care for the more than 800,000 individuals with disabilities and older adults who remain on long waiting lists for services across the country and provide HCBS providers, severely strained by the pandemic, with the funds they need to sustain their services and provide direct care workers with competitive wages, additional training, and more opportunities for professional advancement. Together with the provisions to make Medicaid's Money Follows the Person program and the Protection Against Spousal Impoverishment permanent, these measures will empower millions of Americans with significant care needs to live with greater dignity and independence in their own homes and communities. We urge you to find a way to fund this effort at the maximum level possible to fully realize the promise and potential of the Better Care Better Jobs Act and to meet the future care needs of the country's rapidly rising number of older adults.

We also support a comprehensive approach to stabilizing health coverage for millions of low-income children. Specifically, we support the initiative to permanently authorize CHIP and the bipartisan proposal to provide one year of continuous eligibility for children covered by Medicaid and CHIP. Children are the largest group of people covered by Medicaid and CHIP, and CHIP has served as an essential source of children's coverage, ensuring access to high-quality, affordable, and appropriate health care for children for nearly 25 years. Unlike Medicare and Medicaid, however, CHIP's funding must be periodically renewed, a process which has caused unnecessary instability and uncertainty for the program during funding cliffs. Consistent access to health care improves children's health and well-being, and results in more efficient health care spending over the long-term as we set children on a path to lifelong health.

Similarly, we strongly support the bipartisan initiative to permanently ensure that all pregnant women on Medicaid and CHIP retain their health coverage during the critical first year postpartum, as well as the additional public health investments included in the bill to reduce inequities in maternal health outcomes, strengthen the maternal health workforce, and improve new mothers' mental health. Given our country's position on the top tier of global health, we have an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that this situation has deteriorated in recent years, especially among Black women, who have the highest maternal mortality rate of any group in the country. Medicaid covers nearly half of all births in the nation, and 65 percent of births to Black mothers, yet half of all uninsured new mothers report losing Medicaid after their pregnancies. Ensuring access to

Medicaid and CHIP throughout the first year postpartum on a permanent basis will stabilize access to health care for new mothers and their children while reducing serious health inequities. We are deeply grateful for the temporary extension of postpartum Medicaid coverage as a state plan option enacted in the American Rescue Plan Act, and now urge Congress to build upon this excellent start and ensure postpartum Medicaid coverage on a permanent basis.

In addition, we support inclusion of the bipartisan, bicameral measure to provide inmates the opportunity to enroll in Medicaid during the 30-day pre-release period. More than half of people in the criminal justice system have a mental health condition. Of those with serious mental health conditions, approximately 75 percent also have a co-occurring substance use disorder. Successful reentry into the community requires timely access to addiction, mental health, and other health-related services before release. Providing Medicaid eligibility for incarcerated individuals prior to their release helps reduce recidivism, curb overdose deaths, and promote the health care needs of individuals transitioning back into communities.

Together, these measures represent historic investments in the nation's health care system for millions of low-income Americans. We remain deeply grateful for your leadership and efforts to advance these improvements. If you have questions or seek any additional information, please contact Jonathan Westin at the Jewish Federations of North America, First Co-Chair of the Partnership for Medicaid at Jonathan.Westin@jewishfederations.org or partnershipformedicaid@gmail.com.

We look forward to working with you to advance these and other policies to strengthen the Medicaid program this Congress.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Dental Education Association
American Network of Community Options & Resources (ANCOR)
America's Essential Hospitals
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved
Association for Community Affiliated Plans
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Children's Hospital Association
Easterseals
The Jewish Federations of North America
Medicaid Health Plans of America
National Association of Counties
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Rural Health Clinics
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Rural Health Association

CC: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader