

July 19, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
22 Hart Senate Office Bldg
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Speaker Boehner,

As you continue your work in Congress, we, the undersigned organizations, strongly urge that you hold children harmless in negotiations surrounding the federal budget and ask that you preserve the gains that were achieved last year through passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). There are no “do-overs” for childhood. Cutting safety net programs, including Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Head Start and Community Health Centers, at a time when they are most needed, would have dire consequences for children today and for years to come.

Medicaid and CHIP together provide approximately 35 million children with health insurance coverage, facilitating access to preventive and primary care services that are key to children’s health and development.¹ These safety net programs provide comprehensive, continuous, and child-appropriate coverage to kids who would otherwise not have health insurance. Cutting these programs, through a block grant, cap on spending or change in the federal payment formula to states, will result in children losing health coverage.

Health insurance is an important factor in achieving timely access to health care. Ensuring that children have continuous health insurance coverage is not only good for a child’s health and quality of life in the short-term, but also a smart investment for the long-term:

- Children with appropriate access to health care have an improved chance at reaching their full potential in life.
- Children lacking health insurance experience delays in needed health care; foregone care; poor access to preventive care, delayed treatment of acute illness, and poor health outcomes.²
- Insurance coverage is truly essential for children with chronic illnesses. For example, children with asthma who are either uninsured or have gaps in coverage are more likely to lack the care they need to control this chronic condition and to rely instead on hospital emergency departments for care that is more costly, less effective and potentially traumatic for the child.³

¹ Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, “Health Coverage of Children: The Role of Medicaid and CHIP” (February 2011). <http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7698-05.pdf>

² Szilagyi PG, Schuster MA, Cheng TL. The Scientific Evidence for Child Health Insurance. *Academic Pediatrics*. 2009; 9: 4-6.

³ Halterman JS, Montes G, Shone LP, Szilagyi PG. The Impact of Health Insurance Gaps on Access to Care Among Children with Asthma in the United States. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2008; 8: 43-49.

Unfortunately, not all children in America have health coverage.

- Almost 9 million children under age 17 were without insurance in 2009, at the beginning of the economic downturn.⁴
- Even more children would have been without coverage if the state and federal funds were capped and Medicaid did not have the elasticity to increase enrollment, stemming potential growth in uninsurance among kids.
- During the most recent recession, Medicaid and CHIP provided a safety net for children in families that lost jobs and employer-sponsored coverage. For every one percent increase in the unemployment rate, an additional 600,000 children became eligible for Medicaid and CHIP.⁵

Medicaid and CHIP are not alone in providing support to poor and low income children and families. Putting these key pieces of the safety net in jeopardy poses a moral hazard, as the impact of unwise federal budget decisions may fall directly and disproportionately on those most in need.

- The SNAP program provides food assistance to 40 million people, including 20 million children, many of whom live at or below the poverty line.
- Community Health Centers are a cornerstone of America's health care delivery system, serving 20 million with another 20 million expected under health reform. Cutting funding to these vital programs *and* Medicaid is a one-two punch that threatens their long term financial security.

Balancing the budget on the backs of children is wrong. Cuts to safety net programs, including block granting, capping or changing the payment formula for Medicaid and CHIP, and the rolling back of health reform law provisions will have a disastrous impact on a generation of children.

We implore you not to undermine the success and progress that has been achieved for our children by disrupting their access to health care.

Included with this letter are reports and white papers reinforcing the critical need to sustain safety net programs for America's children. Please feel free to contact the undersigned with any questions or requests.

Sincerely,

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Health Fund
Every Child Matters
First Focus
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
New England Alliance for Children's Health, Community Catalyst
The Children's Partnership

⁴ Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) Data Table #5. Health insurance coverage of the civilian noninstitutionalized population: Population estimates by type of coverage and selected population characteristics, United States, first half of 2009.

⁵ S. Dorn, B. Garrett, J. Holahan, A. Williams, "Medicaid, SCHIP and Economic Downturn: Policy Challenges and Policy Responses," Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured (April 2008).