



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
For science. For action. For health.

May 4, 2017

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to express our continued strong opposition to H.R. 1628, the American Health Care Act of 2017, legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The amended bill would be even worse for the nation's health than the original proposal and does nothing to improve the health of the American public. Additionally, the bill would have the greatest negative impact on the health of the most vulnerable Americans.

According to the March Congressional Budget Office analysis, the legislation would result in 14 million Americans losing health insurance coverage in 2018. By 2026, CBO estimates 24 million individuals would lose coverage, taking the uninsured rate up to a staggering 52 million, nearly double the number of Americans who would lack insurance under existing law. The bill would cut critical premium subsidies for low- and middle-income families and phase out the ACA's Medicaid expansion. Under the proposal, many, especially low-income and older Americans, would pay higher premiums, receive lower subsidies and be subject to higher out of pocket costs, including higher deductibles and co-pays for plans that provide less coverage. Health insurance coverage is critical to preventing disease, ensuring health and well-being and driving down the use of costlier providers of care. Unfortunately, this proposal will result in a greater number of people losing coverage than the number of people who have gained coverage under the Affordable Care Act, putting many at risk of premature death due to the lack of access to critical health services.

The amended bill would be even worse for public health than the original bill that was pulled from the House floor in late March. The amended bill would allow states to opt-out of requiring health plans to cover the 10 essential health benefits such as maternity care, mental health and substance abuse disorder services and prescription drug coverage. It would also allow insurers to charge significantly higher premiums for people with pre-existing conditions and possibly allow insurers to charge older adults even higher premiums. The inclusion of a mere \$8 billion over five years will do little to help people with pre-existing conditions who could see drastically higher premiums leaving millions in the individual and small group market with no protections from insurer discrimination.

The bill would also eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund, the first and only mandatory funding stream specifically dedicated to public health and prevention activities. The fund has already provided more than \$6 billion to support a variety of public health activities in every state including tracking and preventing infectious diseases like the Ebola and Zika viruses, community and clinical prevention programs, preventing childhood lead poisoning and expanding access to childhood immunizations. Eliminating the fund would devastate the budget of the Centers for

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Disease Control and Prevention. The fund currently makes up 12 percent of CDC's budget and eliminating this funding stream would force Congress to replace the funding through the regular appropriations process where resources for nondefense discretionary programs are already too low.

Not only would the bill phase out the Medicaid expansion under the ACA, it would also make other troubling changes to the Medicaid program, converting it to a per capita program. The most recent CBO analysis estimated the bill would cut federal spending on Medicaid by \$839 billion over the next decade, drastically cutting resources to states, many of which are already struggling with tight budgets. The bill would also block Medicaid reimbursements to Planned Parenthood for one year – which CBO estimates will lead to less access to care, more unintended births and more costs for the Medicaid program.

While the Affordable Care Act is not perfect, the law has made progress in addressing the biggest challenges facing our health system including the rising costs associated with our health care system, uneven quality of care, deaths due to medical errors, discriminatory practices by health insurance providers and the shrinking ranks of the nation's primary care providers. The ACA has made progress in shifting our health system from one that focuses on treating the sick to one that focuses on keeping people healthy. We ask you to oppose this and future efforts to repeal or weaken the ACA. Instead, we urge you to work on a bipartisan basis to improve and build upon the successes of the ACA and to work to provide health insurance coverage to the more than 28 million who still lack coverage. We look forward to working with you to create the healthiest nation in one generation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director