



07/28/20

For Immediate Release:

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NATIONAL COALITION ON HEALTH CARE STATEMENT ON THE SENATE'S CARES 2.0, COVID RELIEF PACKAGE

Yesterday, negotiations over a fourth major COVID-19 relief package began in earnest after the Senate released the [Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools](#) (HEALS) Act. The National Coalition on Health Care (NCHC) applauds some elements of the bill, including critical funding for schools and nursing homes, which is necessary for both our economic recovery and protecting those most vulnerable to the novel coronavirus. The HEALS Act also extends telehealth flexibilities in Medicare, which are crucial for people with chronic conditions and the elderly to safely access care. The extension of telehealth flexibilities also ensures that providers are compensated appropriately.

However, the Coalition urges Congress to consider more comprehensive policies that will address the full damage and inequities caused by the public health emergency. The HEALS Act is foremost a stimulus bill, but it needs to be much more to improve the lives of everyday Americans struggling to make ends meet. Without protecting the affordability and accessibility of health care, Congress will slow the ultimate recovery of the United States.

“Congress must meet the public health challenge in order to ultimately save the economy,” said John Rother, NCHC President. “To start, Congress should support primary care as a key to equitable health care access, fund public health infrastructure to ensure we are prepared to test and vaccinate those we need to, and improve access to affordable coverage during the pandemic,” he continued.

Policy Recommendations

NCHC initially communicated member priorities in a [letter](#) to House and Senate leadership in April. Unfortunately, much of the Coalition’s top priorities were not included in the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security](#) (CARES) Act or in the new HEALS Act. By contrast, the House proposals for the fourth package contain many of

these crucial priorities, such as expanding federal participation in Medicaid to prevent significant state budget cuts and shortfalls that will continue to hurt those most vulnerable. The Coalition issued a [summary](#) of the [Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions](#) (HEROES) Act, passed by the House in May, and an additional [summary](#) of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Enhancement Act.

Congress should address the following shortcomings in the next package. For the short-term, Congress should work towards increasing the accessibility and affordability of health care during the pandemic:

- Shield consumers from cost-sharing responsibilities and surprise bills for COVID-19 testing and treatment
- Enhance access to health insurance by incentivizing the expansion of Medicaid, create a federal special enrollment period, and establish temporary COBRA subsidies
- Direct financial assistance to non-hospital based primary care providers and community health centers
- Increase funding for public health infrastructure and workforce

For the long-term, Congress should work towards a more equitable health system that prioritizes quality of care and outcomes:

- Reform prescription drug pricing
- Fund mental health services to address social isolation and loneliness

Importantly, addressing affordability and access will mitigate worsening health disparities. The pandemic has blown open existing gaps in health equity and Congress should take this moment to put forward a comprehensive approach to address this reality. Black and Latino communities have been disproportionately [impacted](#) by the pandemic: more deaths, more layoffs, and are less likely to have access to affordable care. The protests that followed the death of George Floyd demonstrate the popular public call to address social inequality. The Senate's proposal falls short of addressing these calls to action.

About the Coalition

NCHC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to promoting health care affordability and accessibility. The Coalition represents more than 80 participating organizations, including medical societies, businesses, unions, health care providers, faith-based organizations, pension and health funds, insurers, and groups representing consumers, patients, women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. Collectively, our organizations represent more than 100 million Americans