

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
NEUROLOGICAL SURGEONS

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ALEX B. VALADKA, MD
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October 23, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education Labor & Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

SUBJECT: Bipartisan Health Care Reform Legislation

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), we support your efforts to seek bipartisan solutions to improve our nation's health care system. America's neurosurgeons strongly support expanding access to affordable health insurance coverage for every American, enhancing patients' choice of insurance plans and providers, and maintaining reforms that redress a number of inexcusable insurance practices.

While the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) insurance market reforms — such as coverage for pre-existing conditions and guaranteed issue — provide critical consumer protections, rather than lowering costs and expanding choice, premiums have skyrocketed, high deductibles leave patients financially on the hook for their medical bills and narrow networks restrict patient access to the physician of their choice. Thus, by many objective measures, the promises of the ACA have fallen short. Consider the following:

- 20 million more Americans have health insurance today, yet nearly 30 million continue to lack coverage.
- Insurance market reforms — such as coverage for pre-existing conditions and guaranteed issue — provide critical consumer protections. However, because not enough young or healthy people have purchased insurance, the individual and small group market is in a so-called “death spiral.”
- Health insurance premiums remain very expensive for most, and annual double-digit increases are not uncommon. Additionally, consumers face significant out-of-pocket costs with annual deductibles of \$5,000 to \$10,000 in some cases.
- Keeping your preferred physician or insurance plan is not always possible, and insurance practices such as “narrow networks” further restrict choice and access.
- Insurance markets have become less competitive and approximately one-third of counties now only have one insurer.

Of course, for individuals with preexisting conditions and health problems requiring ongoing care, the ACA has been a significant benefit. The same goes for Americans that have received financial assistance for insurance premiums and cost-sharing reduction subsidies; thus continuing this support is critical to ensure that many of our country's most vulnerable patients maintain access to affordable health insurance.

A significant health care reform principle advocated by the AANS and CNS is the notion that patients should have enhanced choice and the flexibility to select the health plan that best meets their needs. As

such, we have repeatedly expressed our concerns that, as implemented, the ACA hinders this flexibility. Your legislation takes a step in the right direction by improving the Section 1332 state waiver process to allow states to adopt innovative health plan designs. In addition, we fully support the provision that allows individuals of all ages — rather than just those who are under 30 — to have the option to purchase catastrophic insurance plans.

Additional Health Care Reforms

While we realize this bill is a “down payment” or a “bridge” to more comprehensive reforms that are under consideration by Congress, we would like to stress that other issues must be addressed to help complete the job. These include:

- Reauthorizing the Children’s Health Insurance Program;
- Expanding health savings accounts;
- Ensuring health plan network adequacy;
- Removing barriers to timely access to care;
- Adopting common-sense medical liability reforms;
- Repealing the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB); and
- Increasing support for graduate medical education.

We are happy to provide additional details on these topics as policymakers continue to identify additional health care reform options.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering our views. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve our country’s health care system for the benefit of our patients. If you have any questions or need additional information, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Alex B. Valadka, MD, President
American Association of Neurological Surgeons



Ashwini D. Sharan, President
Congress of Neurological Surgeons

cc: Members, U.S. Senate

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