

February 3, 2021

Dear President Biden, Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Our nation faces an historic set of challenges but also an historic opportunity to greatly improve the lives of struggling families in America. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) not only exposed the problems with our health care system, it has also given us a blueprint for the change that is needed. As the new Administration and Congress set agendas for the coming year, the undersigned organizations urge you to prioritize comprehensive relief legislation that makes substantial progress toward public health, access to health care, and a more just and responsive health system.

In particular, we urge you to ensure that policy proposals advanced in the coming months adhere to the following principles:

**1. Our health care systems must deliver high quality care for everyone.**

No one in America should face barriers to care because of who we are, where we come from, where we live, what language we speak, or how we identify. Our leaders must take bold action to address disparities and improve the way our nation delivers and pays for health care, especially for the communities hit hardest by the pandemic.

The stark disparities in COVID-19 impacts exposed the devastating effect of long-standing racial injustice on health. The Biden Administration and 117<sup>th</sup> Congress have a responsibility to respond. A COVID-19 package offers an opportunity for both parties to show their commitment to address existing health disparities by enacting policies that ensure communities of color do not suffer massive and disproportionate mortality and illness ever again. The Biden Administration and Congress must develop policies that include the following elements in order to make serious progress towards health equity:

- Immediately prioritize racial equity in all COVID-19 relief policies, including the allocation, distribution, and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines
- Address the devastating maternal mortality crisis and the roots of racial disparities among pre- and post-partum mothers and in childhood.
- Recognize the central role of social drivers in health inequities and enact comprehensive reforms and investments across systems; not only health care but also criminal justice, environmental safety, business opportunity and workplace empowerment, economic justice, housing, and other sectors critical to health and wellness.
- Invest in culturally-competent, diverse, team-based care and a robust community-based health workforce, incorporating these key dimensions of care into payment and delivery systems.
- Ensure that our nation's frontline workers who have been courageous heroes during this pandemic have access to worker protections and to comprehensive health insurance, regardless of income, geography, or immigration status.
- Prioritize support for people that are suffering disproportionately under this pandemic, including families in rural America, the elderly, BIPOC families, immigrants, Tribal Nations, people with disabilities, and people receiving home and community based services or residing in congregate living settings.

**2. Every child, every family, every senior in this country must have access to high-quality, affordable health care and shouldn't face financial ruin if they need care. Our health should not depend on our wealth.**

COVID-19 created a devastating economic crisis, causing tens of millions of individuals to lose their jobs, financial security, and employer-sponsored health insurance. No one in this country should ever have to worry that they can't afford health care or have to choose between filling a prescription and paying their rent or mortgage. This crisis is a tragic reminder that it is long past time for our country to provide its people with universal coverage, as every other advanced country does. Critical to achieving that goal the Biden Administration and Congress must:

- Build on the foundation of the Affordable Care Act by improving the affordability of coverage provided in the Marketplace; extending subsidies to reach even more people; streamlining enrollment policies and bolstering consumer assistance to make it easier and more automatic for families eligible for coverage to enroll; and taking swift action to defend the law and the millions of families who rely on it from politically-motivated lawsuits.
- Expand Medicaid coverage so that it is available for more people who cannot afford healthcare for themselves or their families and allow all people to buy into a public coverage option if they prefer it to private health insurance.
- Improve Medicare and Medicaid to fully meet the needs of our nation's older adults and people with disabilities including coverage of oral health, vision, and hearing services as fundamental benefits under the traditional Medicare program as well as investments in Medicaid home and community-based services.

**3. Our health care system must be reformed to center patients' and families' needs, not profits for huge health corporations that leave consumers footing the bill.**

Our health care system is the most expensive in the world and yet often provides low-quality and low-value care. It does not reward innovation. It does not reward community prevention and public health. Instead, the way we pay for and regulate health care rewards corporate behavior that drives profits at the expense of our families' health. Consumers have long paid the price in unaffordable care, excessive prescription drug prices and insurance premiums, and in rushed medical visits and missed diagnoses. In 2020 they paid a further price as our health system failed to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden Administration and Congress have an opportunity to fix these perverse incentives by:

- Taking bold action to address industry abuses, including allowing the government to negotiate drug prices on behalf of our nation's families and making sure that newly-enacted surprise medical bill protections are implemented strongly and effectively.
- Encouraging innovation rather than manipulation of intellectual property for financial gain.
- Putting people ahead of profits by reducing the rewards for health care industry consolidation.
- Better supporting primary care and creating accountability for quality, equity, patient satisfaction and improving people's health, within the Medicare program and across our system.

The greatness of a nation can be measured by how it handles adversity. Our organizations stand ready to support you in putting this country back on the path to true health and financial wellness, in 2021 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Families USA  
Christina Dumas Kahn,  
Board Chair, California Health Advocates (CHA)