

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**National Health Law Program Commends Passage of Health Reform Bill**

Increased coverage for 32 million individuals

**Washington, DC, March 23, 2010** – Today the President signed into law the health reform bill, which includes the biggest expansion of Medicaid since its inception in 1965. In addition, the law will expand the availability and affordability of health coverage to millions of individuals and families.

“This is an historic moment in our country,” said Emily Spitzer, Executive Director of the National Health Law Program (NHeLP). “The Affordable Health Care for America Act greatly improves the state of our country’s health care system, and it ensures access to health care for many of the lowest income and most vulnerable individuals in the country. For the first time in their lives, millions of people will now be able to access quality, affordable care.”

The bill:

- Expands Medicaid coverage to 16 million people by covering most low-income, non-elderly individuals with incomes up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level, eliminating requirements to meet predefined eligibility categories.
- Eliminates barriers to private coverage and overhauls insurance protections by precluding exclusions based on pre-existing conditions, prohibiting insurers from rescinding policies when someone gets sick, and eliminating gender rating.
- Continues the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) until 2019 and funds it through 2015.
- Requires all HHS programs that are federally funded or conducted to collect race, ethnicity, language, gender, socioeconomic and disability data, so that disparities in care can be identified and eliminated.
- Provides a \$250 prescription drug rebate in 2010 for Medicare beneficiaries and eliminates the donut hole in Medicare prescription drug program (Part D) by 2020.
- Provides \$11 billion to community health centers.
- Extends protection of federal civil rights laws to the health reform bill, thereby protecting individuals from discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics (including race, language, gender, age and disability).
- Reauthorizes the Office of Minority Health through 2016.

This is an important and significant first step forward in reforming this country’s broken health care system and recognizing the right to health care. We are disappointed, however, that women and immigrants are not afforded the health rights they deserve, and we look forward to

Congress building upon this remarkable legislation to address racial and ethnic disparities, access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services, comprehensive women's health care, and coverage and equity for immigrants.

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