

National Health Law Program Supports Expansion of Medicaid under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

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March 1, 2011 – The National Health Law Program (NHeLP) today joined more than 125 health care organizations to call for the continued implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and to support the Medicaid program.

For more than 45 years, the Medicaid program has been a bedrock of the American health system, providing critical health insurance for millions of children, pregnant women, older adults, disabled individuals, and other vulnerable low-income populations. Under the new health care law, more low-income citizens will be covered by Medicaid, with the federal government covering almost all of the costs of the expansion. However some governors have expressed concern about the expansion in light of state budget cuts, and have threatened to deny their citizens access to the program.

“The structure of Medicaid is time-tested and has served states and millions of Americans well in the past 45 years,” said Emily Spitzer, executive director of NHeLP. “States already have tremendous flexibility in the program, and one temporary economic downturn should not radically alter a system that millions of people rely upon.”

Spitzer said that NHeLP, along with its network of advocates across the country, stands ready to work with states to identify ways to address budget shortfalls in balanced ways.

“We understand that there will be some tightening of Medicaid budgets, but a dogmatic and inflexible ‘slash Medicaid’ approach is not the answer. Instead, state budgetmakers should consider increasing revenue and developing new mechanisms to fund their Medicaid programs, in addition to limited and careful Medicaid cutbacks,” Spitzer said.

In a letter to Congress, NHeLP stands with over 125 other organizations that oppose the weakening of Medicaid. The letter points out which members of our society will be most harmed by the proposed changes—namely seniors and children who rely upon Medicaid for their health care needs.

In the letter, NHeLP also expressed its support for the ongoing implementation of health reform. Thanks to the new health care law, states stand to gain far more than the relatively incidental implementation costs they may incur up front: coverage of millions of their residents at virtually no expense to the state. Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the costs for subsidies for state residents in Exchanges, and 90-100 percent of the costs of new Medicaid enrollees.

“Health reform is a critical investment in the future of states, and allowing states the flexibility to force disenrollments today, while reaping the benefits of federal dollars later, is both unfair and dangerous to the health and lives of millions of Americans,” said Mara Youdelman, managing attorney for NHeLP’s Washington, D.C. office.

NHeLP urges state and federal officials to continue implementing health reform, and to look for balanced solutions to our shared problems.

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