

ACP, AMA, AAFP disappointed with passage of AHCA

May 4, 2017

The US House of Representatives narrowly approved the American Health Care Act. The American College of Physicians (ACP), American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) were among more than a dozen health care organizations which released statements soon after urging the Senate to reject the bill and craft bipartisan solutions to improve health care coverage and access for all Americans.

“This vote makes coverage unaffordable for people with pre-existing conditions, allows insurers to opt-out of covering essential benefits like cancer screening, mental health and maternity care, and cuts and caps the federal contribution to Medicaid while sunseting Medicaid expansion,” Jack Ende, MD, MACP, president of ACP, said in a statement.

ACP and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) noted that the bill passed today will result in an estimated 24 million Americans losing health care coverage, with many more susceptible to higher premiums and deductibles, as well as discrimination based on age, gender and health status.

“The House action is by no means the end of the story, however,” Ende wrote. “ACP will continue to do all that it can to ensure continued coverage and access for the millions of patients who have benefited from the Affordable Care Act.”

ACP sent a letter to the Senate today imploring senators to reject the policies in the AHCA that would roll back the coverage of millions of vulnerable Americans, eliminate coverage of essential health benefits and replace income-based premiums and cost-sharing subsidies with regressive age-based tax credits.

“[The AHCA’s] inadequate and temporary high-risk pool funds are simply a band aid that does nothing to provide health security to the nearly one in three Americans who have a pre-existing condition,” John Meigs, Jr., MD, president of AAFP, said in a statement. “Its provision allowing annual and lifetime caps on benefits diminishes the value of every policy sold in the future.”

The House-passed bill violates ACP’s fundamental principle to “first, do no harm,” Ende wrote.

“[ACP] feels strongly that the Senate must reject this legislation as it will result in catastrophic harm by eroding coverage and essential consumer protections for the most vulnerable: older, sicker and poorer patients,” he added. “Instead, we urge Congress to start over and seek agreement on bipartisan ways to make health care better, more accessible, and more affordable for patients rather than imposing great harm on them as the AHCA would do.”

Meigs said the AAFP will now shift its attention to getting the Senate to do what the House did not, that is, getting a health care system that reduces physicians’ administrative burdens, reforms liability laws, lowers pharmaceutical costs and prioritizes patient care.

“We will [also] continue to work with the U.S. Senate to develop policies that guarantee affordable care and coverage, that stabilize the individual insurance market, and that ensure health security for all Americans regardless of their age, gender, or current or past health history,” he said.

In a joint statement, ACP, AAFP, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Osteopathic Association and American Psychiatric

Association also expressed their extreme disappointment with AHCA as amended and passed by the House, arguing that it violates their shared principles.

“We call on the U.S. Senate to do the right thing for patients, first, by not taking up the AHCA in any form, and second by working to achieve real bipartisan solutions to ensure that coverage remains affordable; stabilizing the individual market; ensuring long-term, adequate funding for the CHIP program; making primary, preventive, and mental health and substance use services more readily available to all Americans; lowering the costs of pharmaceutical treatments; reforming our medical liability laws; and reducing the administrative and regulatory burdens that add costs and take our time away from our patients. We stand ready to assist the Congress on achieving these and other necessary improvements,” the organizations wrote in their statement.

Furthermore, the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) released a statement opposing the passage of the health care bill and urging the Senate to reject the bill in its current form, saying that the AHCA would reduce access to essential health services for older adults, caregivers and healthcare professionals.

“The present proposal would still increase costs, reduce coverage, and cut benefits, putting health, independence, and quality of life at risk for all of us as we age,” Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA, CEO of the AGS, said in the statement. “We are committed to working with Congress and the Trump Administration on meaningful reforms, but we continue to oppose changes that might jeopardize access to high-quality, person-centered, and affordable health coverage for all older Americans.”

– *by Alaina Tedesco*

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