

March of Dimes Foundation

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The Honorable John Dingell  
Chairman Emeritus  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller  
Chairman  
Education and Labor Committee  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20505

The Honorable Charles Rangel  
Chairman  
Ways and Means Committee  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman  
Chairman  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2009

Dear Congressmen:

The March of Dimes Foundation applauds your leadership in introducing the America's Affordable Health Choices Act, H.R. 3200. The mission of the March of Dimes to improve the health of women of childbearing age, infants and children by preventing preterm birth, birth defects and infant mortality can best be achieved if all women and children in the U.S. have access to affordable, comprehensive health insurance. The March of Dimes greatly appreciates the numerous provisions in your bill that address issues pertaining to these populations, including improving access to comprehensive private insurance, maintaining and strengthening Medicaid coverage, and investing in the public health system.

H.R. 3200 proposes significant steps forward to ensure that individuals purchasing private health insurance will be able to obtain plans that meet their needs. The March of Dimes strongly supports requiring all plans to cover maternity care, well baby and well child care, as well as medical equipment, habilitative therapy, vision, hearing and oral care services for children. The inclusion of basic preventive health services for children in this legislation is essential, and the Foundation would also encourage the Committee to consider adding a parallel provision for preventive services — such as preconception care — for women of childbearing age. The Foundation strongly supports the bill provision that prohibits the use of pre-existing condition exclusions to limit access to maternity services. This will make it possible for many more pregnant women and children with serious health needs to obtain the medically necessary care required. The Foundation is also pleased that H.R. 3200 would require inclusion of an individual with expertise in pediatrics among the members of the Health Benefits Advisory Committee, and we urge the Committee to add a representative with obstetric and gynecological expertise to help ensure the most medically appropriate benefits for pregnant women.

Congress and the states have already made excellent progress in extending coverage to millions of pregnant women and children through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the March of Dimes enthusiastically supports the Medicaid maintenance of effort provision in H.R. 3200 that would ensure continuation of Medicaid eligibility levels during the transition to full implementation of the reforms contemplated by this bill. With regard to children enrolled in CHIP, the March of Dimes looks forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that transition to coverage through the Exchange is implemented carefully so that children – especially those with significant and ongoing health problems – do not experience any interruption in access to medical services. As a precautionary step, we strongly encourage the Committee to add to the bill a provision requiring concurrence by Congress that the Exchange is ready to enroll these children and provide them the scope of coverage that meets their health needs.

The Foundation wholeheartedly supports the provisions designed to strengthen Medicaid coverage, by ensuring that all pregnant women in Medicaid have access to a comprehensive tobacco cessation benefit and by permitting states to expand Medicaid family planning coverage without a waiver. These common sense approaches can dramatically improve maternal health and birth outcomes while simultaneously lowering healthcare costs for infants by reducing the risk of preterm birth and low birthweight.

Finally, the March of Dimes strongly supports the commitment to strengthen the public health system and create a national strategy to promote good health. Specifically, the creation of a Prevention and Wellness Trust will establish a new and stable funding mechanism to implement a national strategy. Investing in wellness and prevention can help avoid serious costly conditions (including birth defects and preterm birth) and thereby avert the need for expensive – and often lifelong -- treatment. Funding public health prevention and wellness programs is a down payment toward limiting unnecessary suffering and holds promise for reducing systemic health care costs as well. For example, repeated studies have shown that timely immunizations generate both short and long term cost savings and result in overall better health across the lifespan.

Once again, the March of Dimes thanks you for your visionary leadership in advancing national health reform, and we look forward to continuing to work with you toward enactment of the strongest legislation possible for our nation's women and children.

Sincerely,



Marina L. Weiss, Ph.D.  
Senior Vice President, Public Policy  
and Government Affairs

