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March 5, 2010

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi and Chairmen Levin, Waxman, Miller, Baucus, Dodd and Harkin:

The HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) applauds you for your leadership in advancing historic health care reform legislation this year, and strongly supports moving forward without further delay to accomplish comprehensive health care reform. We are hopeful that the final bill will make important strides toward expanding access to quality, lifesaving care for our patients with HIV and strengthening our national capacity to prevent the spread of this deadly disease.

HIVMA represents more than 3,700 physicians, scientists and other health care professionals that work on the frontlines of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in communities across the country. As you complete the final health care reform package we urge to give top priority to the President's proposed strengthening of the Medicaid program by adopting the House-passed measure to increase Medicaid payment rates for primary care services (regardless of specialty) up to 100% of Medicare rates by 2012.

While we strongly support expanding Medicaid to extend health coverage to low income individuals, we are very concerned that failure to address Medicaid reimbursement disparities will weaken an already fragile network of providers at a time when the demand for their services will be growing. Medicaid rates average just 66% of Medicare rates for primary care services and are woefully inadequate to cover the cost of providing HIV care. Many patients with HIV rely on Medicaid for their health care coverage making HIV clinics disproportionately affected by the inadequacy of the rates.

Please also ensure in the final bill that current Medicaid beneficiaries maintain their existing level of coverage as well as gain access to the services included in the essential benefits package if not already covered by their state plan. We must end the geographic disparities that currently exist under Medicaid, while at the same time not leave any Medicaid beneficiaries worse off as a result of reform.

Those who rely on Medicaid to meet their health care needs include millions of low-income women, children, minorities and individuals with disabilities. As you craft the final health care reform bill, please ensure that the remarkable promise offered by health reform will not go unfulfilled for our poorest and most medically-vulnerable residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael S. Saag, MD  
Chair, HIVMA Board of Directors