



January 28, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Doggett
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Brendan Boyle
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Doyle
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Diana DeGette
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Doggett, Fitzpatrick, DeGette, Boyle, and Doyle:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the 136,700 family physicians, residents and medical students we represent, I write to offer our support for the *Ensuring Coverage in Public Health Emergencies Act of 2021*.

Your legislation to establish a 30-day special enrollment period (SEP) for individual and group health plans during any public health emergency declaration expands access to coverage and prioritizes patients' well-being.

Establishing a SEP would ensure that many individuals and families who find themselves uninsured can obtain comprehensive coverage and receive timely access to care during a pandemic. In 2019, there were 29 million uninsured people in the United States, and that number has only increased due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession.¹ Additionally, uninsured people are far more likely than those with insurance to postpone health care or forgo it altogether, and the consequences can be severe, particularly when preventable conditions or chronic diseases go undetected. Access to health insurance not only facilitates access to care and improves health outcomes, but also allows patients the peace of mind associated with being covered.

Most states that fully run their own health insurance marketplaces, rather than relying on HealthCare.gov, implemented SEPs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and saw significant enrollment increases. For example, in Connecticut SEP enrollments increased 97 percent and in California enrollments increased 79 percent in the first five months of 2020 compared to 2019.² Providing more opportunities for people to enroll in coverage and making it easier for them to do so leads to more people getting health insurance.

We look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation. For more information, please contact Erica Cischke, Senior Manager of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs at ecischke@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

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Gary L. LeRoy, MD, FAAFP

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Board Chair, American Academy of Family Physicians

¹ Orgera, K., & Tolbert, J. (2020, November 12). Key Facts about the Uninsured Population. Retrieved January 14, 2021, from <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

² Luek, S., & Broaddus, M. (2020, July 30). Emergency Special Enrollment Period Would Boost Health Coverage Access at a Critical Time. Retrieved January 14, 2021, from https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/emergency-special-enrollment-period-would-boost-health-coverage-access-at-a-critical#_ftn1