

February 17, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Majority Whip
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Kyl
Minority Whip
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, Finance Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member, Finance Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Enzi
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher Dodd
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sirs:

On behalf of the over 300,000 physician and medical student members of the American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Physicians, and American Osteopathic Association, we are writing to urge you to seek agreement at next week's health reform summit on a bipartisan set of reforms to ensure that patients will have access to high quality, affordable primary care.

We recognize that disagreements on many elements of health care reform exist; however, ensuring that patients have access to primary care is not one of them. Bipartisan bills have been introduced in both the House and Senate that would increase funding for primary care training programs, increase Medicare and Medicaid payments for primary care services, and accelerate pilot-testing of the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH). Many of these policies are included in bills approved by the House and Senate. We strongly believe they should be included in any final agreement on moving forward on a bipartisan basis.

Specifically, we advocate the strongest possible policies to reverse a growing and catastrophic shortage of primary care physicians:

- Increase Medicare payments for office, nursing home, home, and hospital visits by primary care physicians by at least 10 percent.
- Increase Medicaid payments for visit services provided by primary care and other physician specialists to no less than the Medicare rates.
- Increase funding levels for primary care training programs, including the National Health Service Corps and Title VII health professions funding.
- Create a new loan repayment program for "front line" health professionals facing shortages.
- Create a workforce commission to recommend policies to ensure a sufficient supply of primary care and other specialties facing shortages.

We also believe that it is essential to reach bipartisan agreement on putting a permanent end to the annual cycle of Medicare payment cuts caused by the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula, which particularly endangers access to primary care.

Without the above policies, the United States will experience a catastrophic shortage of primary care physicians, resulting in longer waits for appointments, delays in getting care, over-crowded emergency rooms and, overall higher costs and poorer outcomes of care. Providing Americans with affordable health insurance coverage is essential, but it will not ensure that patients have access to care in the absence of policies to increase the numbers of primary care physicians.

American Academy of Family Physicians
American College of Physicians
American Osteopathic Association