



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS
STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

March 29, 2010

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians, which is comprised of 94,700 family physicians, residents and students, thank you for your support of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (P.L. 111-148). We appreciate the value that the law places on primary care physicians and we believe that it will make a positive difference for our members and their patients.

Much has been written about the new law's expansion of health insurance coverage to approximately 32 million of the uninsured. We commend Congress for responding to this critical deficit in our current health insurance system and also appreciate the many necessary reforms that the legislation makes to health insurance practices, like discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, imposition of coverage limits, and rescission of coverage because of sickness.

The law also benefits those *with* insurance by helping refocus the health care system on preventive health, chronic disease management and primary care. For example, for five years, the law will provide eligible primary care physicians with a 10-percent bonus payment for the primary care services that they deliver to Medicare patients. In addition, for two years, it will provide funding to states to make sure Medicaid payments to primary care physicians are on par at least with Medicare payments for the same services. Together, these provisions recognize the value that primary care medicine brings to the health of patients.

We further appreciate the legislative authority given to CMS to test the applicability of the patient-centered medical home (PCMH) for specific high-need Medicaid beneficiaries. We hope that the newly created Center for Innovation at CMS soon will be able to bring this promising practice model to Medicare beneficiaries, as well. Based on results from numerous tests of this model in the private sector, we are convinced that as the PCMH model is tested further and its results are disseminated, all patients will have better health care because physician practices will provide higher quality, efficient care resulting in greater satisfaction for both parties.

Finally, we recognize the considerable investment Congress has made in primary care education and training, since the law will demand a growing number of primary care physicians to care for a greater number of patients. Providing medical students with more opportunities for scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, based on their commitment to family medicine and to primary care, will signal the value the nation places on their service.

The bill is not perfect, of course. We are deeply concerned that Congress has not yet successfully addressed the flawed formula that determines how Medicare pays for medical services. The Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula and Congress's inability to provide a stable and reliable payment rate are causing growing concerns among our members and their patients. Unless this payment method is fixed permanently, the Medicare program becomes increasingly insecure.

The legislation does include provisions to test alternatives to the current irrational medical liability system. These alternatives are similar to those contained in legislative proposals offered by Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming that

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AAFP has supported in the past. If these alternatives do not control excessive litigation, Congress should continue to support procedures that will reduce liability insurance premiums and eventually the costs of defensive medicine.

We have many suggestions for improvements to this large and complex law, but overall the legislation is a historic accomplishment that will improve the quality of health care in this nation and will invest in a system eventually based on primary care. For this, we are grateful for your vote in favor of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. We hope to continue our discussions with you and your staff about improving this law, but in the meantime, we congratulate you on your extraordinary commitment to better health care in this nation.

Please let us know how we can be of assistance to you and your constituents as this important law is implemented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ted Epperly MD". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Ted Epperly, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair