

March 5, 1999

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress and the President to take immediate action to increase access to health insurance coverage for low-wage uninsured workers, as an initial step toward providing coverage to the estimated 43 million Americans who lack health insurance coverage.

Despite the longest peacetime economic expansion in history, the number of uninsured continues to grow, having increased by more than 15 percent over the past five years. Unless immediate action is taken, current trends suggest that the number of uninsured Americans will grow to almost 50 million within the next five years.

We urge the Congress to commit to a plan of action that would include the following:

1. Commit sufficient funds out of the federal budget to make affordable coverage available to all Americans with incomes up to 150 percent of poverty.
2. Apply the funds to targeted initiatives that would be designed to make coverage affordable and available to such low wage workers and the poor. Congress should specifically consider such approaches as refundable tax credits for individuals between 100-150 percent of poverty, expansion of Medicaid to all individuals below the federal poverty level, increased funding for Medicaid outreach programs, and subsidies to help the temporarily uninsured purchase COBRA coverage. Any tax credit that would be applied to the purchase of health insurance coverage must be set at a level that is high enough for low-wage employees to purchase a good basic benefit plan.

We also believe that it is the time to renew the national debate on health care reform and to seek comprehensive solutions to the inequities in America's health care system.

At a time of unprecedented economic prosperity, it is unconscionable that so many Americans are unable to obtain affordable health care coverage. A commitment by the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress to make affordable coverage available to uninsured individuals with incomes up to 150 percent of poverty would represent an important "down payment" on solving the problem of the uninsured. Our organizations are committed to working with you in support of this compelling national priority.

American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology  
American Academy of Physician Assistants  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Gastroenterology  
American College of Physicians - American Society of Internal Medicine  
American College of Rheumatology  
American College of Surgeons  
American Medical Women's Association

Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of Professors of Medicine  
National Coalition on Health Care  
Renal Physicians Association