

February 9, 1999

Dear Member of Congress:

On February 10th the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM) will release to the public the enclosed document "Re-Directing Budgetary Priorities to Help the Uninsured: A Call to Action from America's Internists." The College is a medical specialty organization representing 115,000 internists and medical students.

Despite a booming economy, the portion of uninsured Americans continues to increase. Clearly, the problem will not self-correct. The ACP-ASIM plan calls on Congress and the Administration to take immediate steps to help the more than 43 million American who lack health insurance coverage. The College recommends that a significant portion of projected budget surplus be used over the next five years to expand health insurance coverage to approximately 10.5 million Americans.

The plan specifically calls on Congress and the president to:

1. Dedicate an amount equal to 12.6 percent of the budget surplus over the next few years toward expanding access to health insurance coverage. This level of funding would cover an estimated 10.5 million uninsured Americans.
2. Target the dedicated funds to support the following initiatives to help low-to-moderate income Americans obtain coverage.
 - Enact a refundable tax credit for uninsured Americans whose incomes fall below 100-150 percent of the poverty level. The tax credit would target low-to-moderate income working Americans who now have the greatest difficulty in affording coverage.
 - Expand Medicaid to provide coverage to all Americans with incomes up to 100 percent of poverty. Since many states do not cover all individuals with poverty-level incomes, this would target the poorest Americans who now lack coverage.
 - Expand funding for Medicaid outreach. Outreach programs are targeted to individuals who are eligible for Medicaid but not enrolled.
 - Provide federal subsidies for temporarily unemployed and uninsured persons to obtain coverage under the Consolidated Omnibus Reconciliation Act (COBRA) program.

While the proposals we have outlined do not provide coverage to all Americans, they would begin to reverse the ever-growing number of uninsured.

The College is concerned about the uninsured because being uninsured is a risk factor for poor health. Uninsured people receive fewer health services, are sicker, and face higher mortality rates than those with insurance.

If you would like to obtain additional details on our proposal, please contact the Washington Office of ACP-ASIM. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with you and your staff all of the potential remedies to this problem.

Sincerely yours,

Harold C. Sox, MD, FACP
President