



May 22, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senate Majority Leader McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) and its nearly 8,000 certified nurse-midwife (CNM) and certified midwife (CM) members, we write to express concerns regarding potential changes to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and other critical health programs poised to impact women and newborns. ACNM urges lawmakers to support legislative efforts that build upon the significant gains made for women's health in the United States. Specifically, ACNM requests that any efforts to replace and/or improve upon the ACA, continue to protect women's access to care, preventative services, Medicare and Medicaid services coverage, and reproductive and sexual health benefits.

ACNM is the professional association that represents CNMs and CMs in the U.S. With roots dating to 1929, ACNM sets the standard for excellence in midwifery education and practice in the U.S. and strengthens the capacity of midwives in developing countries. Our members are primary care providers for women throughout the lifespan, with an emphasis on pregnancy, childbirth, and gynecologic and reproductive health care.

Currently, there are some 12,000 CNMs/CMs throughout the U.S. These midwives attend over 330,000 deliveries of newborns in country annually. Nearly all midwifery births occur in the hospital, with some in birth centers and others in homes. Midwives promote healthy physiologic birth. By doing so, they help reduce the incidence of unnecessary caesarean sections and other interventions. Healthy physiologic birth means healthier moms and newborns, fewer complications and side-effects, and much lower health care costs.

The ACNM and its members stand for improving access to quality care and coverage for women and newborns. We support common-sense policy solutions that ensure women and newborns have guaranteed health coverage and access to a full range of preventative, reproductive and sexual health services under state Medicaid programs and coverage and access to essential health benefits (EHBs), including maternity and newborn care. As such, our membership has expressed several concerns with the ACA reform legislation recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Many of the provisions included in the American Health Care Act (AHCA), as passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on May 4, 2017, would radically turn back the clock on the progress made in women's health. Specifically, ACHA enables states to apply for the ability to waive EHBs subsequently denying access to maternity and newborn to millions. Provisions included in the ACHA would allow states to waive community rating rules and to shift patients with preexisting conditions or illnesses into high-risk pools. Furthermore, AHCA makes dramatic changes in Medicaid program eligibility and in funding for states that would cover fewer beneficiaries. Together, the AHCA's changes to Medicaid put at high-risk the health and health coverage of our nations' most vulnerable populations. Diminished Medicaid coverage and benefits impair women from obtaining needed pre-natal care, and would force higher lifelong health costs.

ACNM understands that the Senate plans to draft their own version of ACA reform legislation to address the rising costs of health insurance and healthcare and other aspects of the ACA in need of improvement. As the Senate prepares to examine and address ways in which the ACA can be improved upon, ACNM urges you to be mindful of the following:

- Women currently have coverage for critical health services, including maternity care, prescription drugs, and chronic disease management. Before the health reform law, only about 12% of health care plans sold in the individual market offered maternity coverage, and women paid about \$1 billion more than men each year for similar health plans in the individual market. Today, fewer than 8% of women and girls are uninsured, an historic low, and the law prohibits plans from charging higher premiums to beneficiaries for being women. **ACNM requests that Congress continue to protect women's access to full coverage and care.**
- Women currently have access to all Food and Drug Administration-approved methods of birth control without out-of-pocket costs. Implementation of the birth control benefit has caused significant improvements in birth control coverage and access for many women. **ACNM requests that Congress continue to require plans cover birth control as a benefit, as well as the full range of reproductive and sexual health services for women. These services are crucial for women, men, and families, and sharing their costs and risks across all beneficiaries promotes health by reducing barriers to people obtaining the care that they need. As people's access to reproductive and sexual health services is so important, especially for persons within vulnerable populations, ACNM opposes efforts to render Planned Parenthood ineligible for federal funding.**

- Women currently access a range of preventive services without worry of copays or deductibles. These include well-woman visits, gestational diabetes screening, domestic and interpersonal violence screening and counseling, breastfeeding support, and other valuable screenings that will save lives, aid in treatment, and save money for the health care system. **ACNM requests that Congress continue to require plans cover preventative services for women.**
- Senior women and those with disabilities currently access well-woman services provided by midwives within the Medicare program as fair reimbursement has made it possible for these professionals to participate in the program. **ACNM requests that Congress ensure women who are Medicare beneficiaries continue having their midwife-provided services covered by Medicare as they are today.**
- Many more women currently can access needed health care services via the expansion of the Medicaid program. Medicaid now covers 17% of the nation's non-elderly women. Women have benefited substantially as more women rely on Medicaid coverage than men. **ACNM requests that Congress support a strong Medicaid program, which covers half of the childbirths in the United States. By covering services for women in vulnerable populations, Medicaid not only supports better health for women and children but also reduces costs and complications associated with missing needed prenatal and postnatal care – important benefits that midwives can provide.**

There is no question that the ACA can be improved upon. As the Senate considers opportunities for improvement, it is critical to move forward not backwards. Putting the care of women first allows our nation to promote and improve health for entire families. ACNM and its members stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration to prioritize the healthcare of women and newborns through improvement of laws and programs that support access to affordable coverage and the excellent care midwives can provide. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to this effect. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at fpurcell@acnm.org or 240-485-1810.

Sincerely,



Frank J. Purcell
CEO
American College of Nurse-Midwives

cc: Chairman, Ranking Members and Members of the following committees:
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
Senate Finance Committee