



June 23, 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 in strong opposition to the “Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017” (BCRA) as introduced on June 22. While our priorities have been to strengthen women’s access to quality care and coverage and to build upon recent gains in women’s health, the BCRA strips away coverage, impairs consumer protections crucial to women, and reduces access to critical health care programs, many of which specifically benefit women and babies. For these reasons, ACNM urges the Senate to oppose this legislation in its current form.

ACNM urges lawmakers to fully consider the negative impacts that will arise should this legislation come to pass and consider supporting legislative efforts that build upon the significant gains made for women’s health in the United States. We request that any efforts to replace and/or improve upon the Affordable Care Act (ACA), continue to protect women’s access to care, preventative services, Medicaid 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 BCRA currently under discussion in the Senate.

Many of the provisions included in BCRA would radically turn back the clock on the progress made in women's health. Of significant concern to ACNM, our midwife membership, and the women, newborns and families our members serve, is the provision that sunsets the essential health benefits requirement expanded upon and protected under the ACA. Effective December 31, 2019, insurance providers would no longer be required to cover these critical health benefits, which include prenatal, maternity and postnatal care; pediatric care and mental health and substance abuse treatment, as the legislation enables states to change what qualifies as an essential benefit by applying for a waiver. This could result in women with preexisting conditions (e.g., pregnancy) losing needed access to maternity care coverage. The additional burden of out-of-pocket costs in the tens of thousands of dollars is enough to bankrupt many growing families. At very modest cost, ACA protects maternity care as an essential health benefit. In doing so, it protects the interest of our families and our country in children being born safely to mothers who have had the care they need for a healthy start in life.

Furthermore, BCRA also makes dramatic changes in Medicaid program eligibility and in funding for states, covering fewer beneficiaries. These drastic 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.

As the Senate prepares to deliberate this legislation, 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.**
- 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. In its current form, BCRA would devastate millions of women, children and families by reducing access to critical health care benefits and coverage. **ACNM is strongly opposed to this legislation in its current form.**

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](mailto:fpurcell@acnm.org) or 240-485-1810.

Sincerely,



Lisa Kane Low, CNM, PhD  
President, American College of Nurse-Midwives



Frank J. Purcell  
CEO, American College of Nurse-Midwives

cc: Members of the Senate Finance Committee  
Members of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee