



May 22, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley:

The National League for Nursing (NLN) commends your leadership in advancing health care reform and is pleased to offer comments on the Finance Committee's document entitled *Expanding Health Care Coverage: Proposals to Provide Affordable Coverage to All Americans*. With more than 1,200 nursing schools and health care agencies, some 30,000 individual members comprising nurses, educators, administrators, public members, and 21 constituent leagues representing 28 states, the NLN is the premier organization dedicated to excellence in nursing education that prepares the nursing workforce to meet the needs of our diverse populations.

Fundamental to the nursing profession and to nurse educators, and integral to the NLN's core values, is the principle that all individuals must have equitable access to comprehensive health care services addressing all health conditions, including mental disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, and addictions. The NLN supports reforms that will create a health care system that increases access to affordable, quality, cost-effective, and patient-centered care that is available to all.

PUBLIC HEALTH INSURANCE OPTION

The NLN supports public initiatives providing affordable health insurance for the uninsured and underinsured including the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). While the NLN does not advocate one approach over another for the public health insurance option, it does urge the committee to carefully examine all policy variables that could secure equal access to quality health care for people in our nation who are uninsured and underinsured. Additionally, the NLN commends the committee for ensuring that children have more coverage through the Health Insurance Exchange for primary coverage and CHIP for secondary coverage.

PROMOTION OF PREVENTION AND WELLNESS

Because it is integral to nursing and nursing education, the NLN affirms that a high performance health care system emphasizes wellness and preventive care. Rather than primarily focusing on the treatment of acute episodes, affordable, sustainable health care is grounded in care for the whole individual and in health promotion. Such a field of vision in nursing care naturally encompasses care coordination and disease prevention, leading to improved health outcomes while reducing costs.

The NLN supports the proposed options from the committee for the prevention and wellness plans in Medicare and Medicaid, and advocates for services related to mental health and substance use disorders likewise to be covered equitably under these plans. Additionally, the NLN supports the options put forth by the committee to manage chronic disease and to encourage healthy lifestyles through the use of grants and employer wellness credits.

The NLN further encourages the Finance Committee to consider the establishment of a Public Health and Wellness Trust Fund that could be funded through a mandatory appropriation or set-aside of a portion of new revenues generated through the financing of health reform. Resources from the Trust Fund would be allocated to specific public health programs or activities as directed by the Appropriations Committees funding for Function 550 public health programs. The Trust Fund would support expansion of public health functions and services that surround, support, and strengthen the health care delivery system. It would finance:

- The core governmental public health functions of assessment, assurance, and policy development at the federal, state, and local levels
- Population-level non-clinical prevention and wellness programs which can be delivered through governmental and non-governmental agencies. Programs would be evidence-based community prevention programs that target priority health outcomes as identified in the National Prevention Strategy.
- Clinical preventive services (such as screenings and immunizations) delivered in community settings or by health departments that are not covered by third party payers
- Workforce training and development, as well as public health research

The National League for Nursing is eager to work with you and your colleagues in making health care coverage affordable for all Americans. We know this is the right time to make a difference in our health care system. If we can be of any assistance to the Committee on Finance as it develops its policy options, please do not hesitate to contact me or Kathleen Ream, the NLN's government affairs director, who can be reached at 703-241-3974 or at kream@nlm.org.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beverly Malone", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Beverly Malone, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chief Executive Officer