

High Quality and Affordable Care for All

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has exposed the failures of the American health care system. Congress has taken emergency action to provide testing and paid sick time to reduce the spread of this virus. However, treatment is still unaffordable for many with high-deductible insurance coverage. Millions more Americans have lost access to their employer-based coverage as the economy has been thrown into recession.

All Americans deserve access to quality, affordable health care and the financial protection of comprehensive health insurance, especially in times of historic uncertainty.

Instead of expanding access to care, the Trump Administration and Republicans in Congress have worked tirelessly to undermine and undo the progress of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA), endangering the coverage of millions of Americans even as the pandemic worsens.

We must defend programs and policies important to our members, retirees, and their families – Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and the ACA. But we must also build on these programs to create a pathway to a sustainable universal, comprehensive health care system, such as Medicare For All.

Here are some near term actions that Congress can take in order to help pave the way to that goal:

Protect and Expand Public Insurance Programs – Millions of Americans depend on public insurance programs and subsidies for affordable coverage. However, these critical programs are under attack as Republicans look for ways to pay for their budget-busting corporate tax cuts. We must protect Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP and the ACA from further erosion while expanding eligibility so more American can enjoy the security of comprehensive health coverage. That includes expanding Medicaid eligibility in all 50 states, increasing subsidies on the ACA exchanges, reducing the Medicare eligibility age, and giving all Americans the choice of enrolling in a Medicare-type public option health care plan.

Strengthen Employer Sponsored Coverage – As health care costs have grown, employers have systematically eroded employer-based health plans with higher premiums and deductibles. This cost shifting has outpaced wage increases for many working families and has increasingly made care unaffordable for the 157 million Americans who rely on job-based coverage. Repealing the 40% Health Benefit Tax was an important first step, but more steps are needed. Strengthening the ACA Employer Mandate will ensure that all workers have affordable coverage while eliminating the competitive disadvantage for Union employers that provide good coverage.

Make Drug Prices Affordable For All Americans – Americans pay more than any other comparable country for prescription drugs. These costs are an enormous burden on working families that need maintenance medication, such as insulin, for the treatment of chronic conditions. We must create a process for the federal government to take an active role in negotiating drug prices paid by Americans on both public and private plans. The process must include mechanisms and penalties that will force pharmaceutical companies to the negotiating table to bring down costs.

Require Paid Sick Leave – The United States lags behind the developed world in mandated paid sick time for workers. Congress has taken the necessary step of ensuring paid sick time for millions of workers in case they are impacted by the novel coronavirus, but COVID-19 is not the only disease that is spread when sick employees are forced to work to make ends meet. Without mandatory paid sick time for all workers, no insurance plan can ensure care is affordable because serious illness means a loss of income for struggling workers. State and local governments have taken the lead requiring paid sick leave for working families. Congress must pass legislation mandating paid sick leave for all.