National AIDS-Related Health Groups Urge Congress to Save Obamacare

Four elements that any health care bill should include to help prevent HIV and help those living with the virus

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Five national health organizations “strongly oppose” the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare) and are calling upon Congress and the Trump administration to ensure continued protections for people living with HIV.

In a press release, AIDS United, the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD), the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) and The AIDS Institute (TAI) state that the Republican plan to repeal and replace the ACA with the American Health Care Act (AHCA) would decrease coverage and increase costs for people living with HIV/AIDS.

What’s more, the Republican health plan would limit access to Medicaid, the state and federal health program for low-income people, and it would result in fewer screenings for sexually transmitted infections (STIs, also called STDs). In short, the bill would reverse the progress the United States has recently seen in its fight against the epidemic.

“We strongly urge Congress and the Administration to preserve crucial aspects of the existing Affordable Care Act and Medicaid to continue the progress we have made on HIV and STD prevention, treatment, care, and support and make changes where improvements need to be made,” states the press release, before spelling out four key aspects (bolded aspects are bolded in the press release):

1. Maintain the current Medicaid funding structure, including expansion of the program, to allow states to respond to current need and increased demand for Medicaid coverage during tough economic times, unanticipated outbreaks or disasters and when there are health innovations, such as the recent curative breakthrough treatments for hepatitis C. This bill eliminates Medicaid expansion in 2020 and drastically changes the funding mechanism for the overall Medicaid program to a per capita calculation, rather than reflecting the actual costs of the Medicaid population.

2. Ensure access to an affordable minimum essential benefits package that includes the range of

services and treatments that people at risk for and those living with HIV and STDs need to stay healthy, including prescription drug benefits, substance use and mental health treatment, and preventive services without cost-sharing. Though the proposed bill preserves most of the Essential Health Benefits requirements, we are concerned that Congress and the Administration continue to uphold these important protections.

3. Keep health care affordable and accessible by maintaining non-discrimination protections and ensuring adequate, up-front premium and cost-sharing assistance for low-income individuals. This includes maintaining the bans on annual and lifetime benefits caps to ensure access to care and coverage when it is needed most. This legislation eliminates actuarial value requirements for health plans and reduces the amount of premium support low-income people will receive, which will disproportionately impact individuals living with chronic conditions.

4. Maintain funding for the Prevention and Public Health Fund and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure that the end of HIV remains a winnable battle within our lifetime. With additional effort and support for evidence-based, cost-effective strategies that we can implement now and a robust health care infrastructure throughout our nation, we will have a significant impact on our nation's health.

For related articles, read "24 Million to Lose Insurance Under GOP Plan, Says CBO Report," "AIDS Groups React to the GOP's Health Care Plan: 'Please Vote NO,'" and "What Does the GOP's Health Care Bill Mean for People With HIV?"

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