



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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JACL AND HEALTH CARE REFORM

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) strongly supports comprehensive health care reform and commends Congress on their tireless efforts these past months. *Affordability* and *access* to health care for all are main concerns for the JACL. Health care should be a right, not a privilege in America. The JACL looks forward to having historic health care legislation signed by the President in the near future. Below are some of the key issues that the JACL supports:

PUBLIC OPTION

Having a public health insurance option is arguably one of the most important aspects of health care reform. It directly addresses JACL's main concerns of affordability and access. The public option would provide critical competition needed to drive down the costs of private health insurance plans. The U.S. House of Representatives' health care bill includes a *national exchange* that would provide coverage to 47 million people who are currently uninsured. The national exchange would also assist small businesses and directly affect the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community since a huge population of AAPIs own and run their own businesses.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

Medicaid is known to be a vital source of health care for low-income families. The expansion of Medicaid would greatly assist the AAPI community since nearly one in four Southeast Asians, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders live in poverty. The U.S. House of Representatives' health care bill is expected to assist families with incomes less than *150 percent of the poverty level* (in comparison to the Senate bill which would only extend eligibility to 133 percent of the federal poverty level) which potentially expands coverage to 15 million new recipients.

FAIR TREATMENT OF IMMIGRANTS

The JACL applauds Congress for lifting the five year waiting period for *legal* immigrant children under the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) and for *legal* immigrant pregnant women. Since many AAPI families are affected by immigrant issues, these provisions are particularly important to our community. Allowing children to have access to health care is also important in preventative care which in the long run can help reduce the overall cost of health care. However, it is disappointing that neither the U.S. House of Representatives nor

the Senate have considered lifting the five year waiting period for all legal immigrants. Legal immigrants who work hard and pay taxes rightfully deserve to have the option of affordable, high quality health care. Allowing this population to access health care services would reduce emergency room visits, which has been tabulated to increase the overall cost of health care.

MEANINGFUL INSURANCE REFORM

In addition to having the public health insurance option for meaningful health insurance reform, the JACL supports the U.S. House of Representatives' health care bill that includes removal of the antitrust exemption from private health insurance companies. By doing so, private health insurance companies will no longer be able to conduct unethical activities involving price fixing and bid rigging. Furthermore, we commend both chambers of Congress for eliminating *pre-existing conditions*, which has been used to discriminate against certain individuals. Access to health care services is important and especially crucial to individuals with actual medical conditions.