

March 23, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear President Obama and Secretary Sebelius:

On this second anniversary of the enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), members of the Health Equity and Accountability Act (HEAA) Community Working Group, representing national, state and local advocates for the elimination of health and health care disparities experienced by minorities and underserved communities, celebrate this historic law and commend your Administration's dedication to improving our nation's health.

As your Administration has recognized, not all Americans have equal access to health care and public health services, leading to disparate health outcomes. Racial and ethnic health disparities based on a variety of factors including primary language, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, citizenship and immigration status, disability, geographic location, age, weight, and income and socio-economic status, compound social inequities and threaten the sustainability of our health care system. Long-standing obstacles to health services have unconscionably led to disease and secondary conditions, costly emergency room visits, loss of productivity and functional ability, unnecessary institutionalization and premature death. The result is that millions of Americans do not reach their potential to live healthy, full, and productive lives.

Two years after the ACA's enactment, the law has taken root and is already improving the lives of individuals and families in the communities we serve. The law's investment in community-based health care and prevention are critical, including support for expanding the reach of community health centers and targeted Community Transformation Grants to address social determinants of health. Affordability mechanisms, such as small business health care tax credits, and insurance market reforms, including ending discrimination on the basis of pre-existing conditions, have improved access to health coverage for many workers and families. Thanks to the ACA, more of our seniors and people with disabilities can now afford their medications, and more of our young adults are holding on to health coverage through their parents' plans. The rule requiring no co-pays for a wide-range of preventive health services, including a broad set of immunizations, cervical cancer screenings and contraception, will also significantly enhance the health of many, especially low-income underserved communities for whom even modest costs present a barrier. Additionally, the Affordable Care Act permanently reauthorized the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA), which was critical to updating and modernizing the Indian Health System to provide health care to 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

As the ACA is further implemented, there is even greater opportunity to promote health equity for the underserved populations we represent. For instance, the robust non-discrimination protections of Section 1557 of the ACA and the new federal standards on data collection will be essential to tracking progress toward eliminating gaps in health care access and quality for disparities communities. The Medicaid program, which already serves many populations in our communities, will serve millions more through its expansion and higher federal matching rate. Federal standards on coverage and benefit design in the state health insurance exchanges and tax credits will help make coverage available, meaningful, and affordable for low- and moderate-income individuals and families, especially those with disabilities. With the elimination of deductibles and co-pays for certain preventive health screenings, such as cholesterol tests, breast cancer screenings, and diabetes screenings, many Medicare recipients will have more tools to fight and prevent disease and illness. Recognizing that improved access to insurance coverage is necessary but not sufficient to improving health equity, Title V of the ACA makes significant investments in the health care workforce to increase the number of professionals practicing in underserved communities and providing linguistically- and culturally-appropriate care. These provisions are essential to helping our communities achieve greater access to the health services they need.

We acknowledge that achieving health equity is a long-term goal, as the issue intersects with a myriad of social, political and economic factors. As such, we also commend your commitment to our nation's health through other historic initiatives such as the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities, Healthy People 2020, the National Prevention Strategy and the National Stakeholder Strategy for Achieving Health Equity – strategic plans that together represent the country's first coordinated roadmap to reducing health disparities.

The ACA is the most significant piece of health disparities legislation enacted in the past four decades. As a coalition made up of minority health advocacy groups, professional associations, and trade organizations, we continue to promote and defend the ACA and the steps it will take to increase health equity, and support the legislation's full funding and implementation. We similarly appreciate the openness and commitment your Administration has given to the HEAA Community Working Group.

We look forward to continuing to work with your Administration on the full implementation of the ACA and in building a future in which all Americans can live with health, dignity, and the promise of fairness, justice and equal opportunity.

Sincerely,

A Brave New Day
ActionAIDS
AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts
AIDS Community Research Initiative of America
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIDS Project Los Angeles

AIDS Resource Center Ohio
AIDS United
Alaskan AIDS Assistance Association
Alliance for a Just Society
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Heart Failure Nurses
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery
American Society of Clinical Oncology
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center
Asian American Health Coalition of Greater Houston- HOPE Clinic
Asian American Justice Center, member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian American Youth Council of Dayton
Asian Americans For Equality
Asian Center - Southeast Michigan
Asian Health Services
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian Pacific Community in Action
Asian Pacific Liver Center
Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership (APPEAL)
Asian Services In Action
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Association of Black Cardiologists
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP)
Black Women's Health Imperative
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
California Partnership
California Primary Care Association
CANN-Community Access National Network
Caring Ambassadors Program
Center for American Progress Action Fund
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Children Now
Chinese Association of Greater Toledo (CAGT)
Clinica Sierra Vista
Coalition for Asian American Children & Families
Collaborative Center for Justice, Inc.

Colorado AIDS Project
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
Commission on the Public's Health System
Community Access National Network
Community Catalyst
Community Organizations in Action
Dab the AIDS Bear Project
Disability Policy Consortium
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Doctors for America
Families USA
Family Equality Council
Family Health Project
Gay & Lesbian Medical Association
Georgetown Vietnamese Student Association
Guam Communications Network
Harm Reduction Coalition
Health Law Advocates of Louisiana
HealthHIV
Healthy Kinder, Inc
Hepatitis B Foundation
Hepatitis B Initiative of Washington D. C.
HIV Law Project
HIV Prevention Justice Alliance (HIV PJA)
HKNA
Hmong National Development, Inc.
Housing Works
Human Rights Campaign
Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition
Immunization Action Coalition
Institute for the Advancement of Multicultural & Minority Medicine
International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation
Japanese American Citizens League
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Kalamazoo-Muskegon Michigan Black Nurses Association
Kalusugan Coalition, Inc.
La Fe Policy Research and Education Center
Land Stewardship Project
Latino Commission on AIDS
Leeward Chuukese Immigrant Church
Lia Margolis and Associates
Lifelong AIDS Alliance
Maternal and Child Health Access
Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign
MichUHCAN

Missouri Hepatitis C Alliance
Morehouse School of Medicine
Moveable Feast
Movement is Life
MQVN Community Development Corp.
Nana's Wish
National Urban League
National AHEC Organization
National Alliance for HIV Education and Workforce Development (NAHEWD)
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Nurses Association
National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network
National Center for Health and the Aging
National Center for Health in Public Housing
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Congress of American Indians
National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians (NCAPIP)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latino AIDS Action Network (NLAAN)
National Latino Tobacco Control Network
National Minority AIDS Council
National Nursing Centers Consortium
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Tongan American Society
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
Nebraska Appleseed
New Mexico Voices for Children
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage
NICOS Chinese Health Coalition
NO/AIDS Task Force
North American Management

Northwest Health Law Advocates
NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health
Obesity Action Coalition
OCA
Ohio AIDS Coalition
Ohio Asian American Health Coalition
Out of Many, One
Papa Ola Lōkahi i
PHI (Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute)
PICSN
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Project CHARGE
Project Inform
Public Justice Center
Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Samoan National Nurses Association
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders
Sisters Together And Reaching, Inc. (STAR)
Society for Women's Health Research
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Street Level Health Project
Summit Health Institute for Research and Education, Inc.
TakeAction Minnesota
The AIDS Institute
The CHOW Project
The Health Consumer Center of the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County
The National Association of People with AIDS
The Obesity Society
Toledo ChinaCenter
Total Health Care
Transgender Law Center
Utah Health Policy Project
Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VAYLA)
Voices for America's Children
Women Together for Change - U.S. Virgin Islands
WORLD (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease)

Cc: J. Nadine Gracia, MD, MSCE, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health,
Office of Minority Health, Department of Health and Human Services
Cc: Cecilia Muñoz, Director, White House Domestic Policy Council