Presidents of Five Medical Organizations Representing 500,000 Physicians and Medical Students Meet with U.S. Senators With One Message: Protect Patients' Access to Health Care

(Washington, February 2, 2017)— Leaders of five medical organizations representing 500,000 physicians and medical students today urged U.S. senators to maintain affordable and meaningful coverage and access to health care for the millions of Americans who are now covered under current law and benefit from other consumer protections.

In meetings with Republican and Democratic senators, the presidents of the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Osteopathic Association laid out five recommendations for any legislation that would make changes to our current health care system:

Do not increase the number of uninsured. Individuals with health insurance coverage today should not become uninsured as a result of any legislative or administrative short-term actions or inactions, the physicians told the senators. Individuals, who have already secured health care coverage, including those covered as a result of Medicaid expansion, should keep it. Furthermore, individuals should be protected from loss of coverage that could result, should there be further destabilization of the individual and small group market.

"America's primary care physicians stand together in a strong message to Congress: Make sure a reformed ACA meets the needs of our patients," said Thomas Gellhaus, MD, president of ACOG. "First and foremost, this means continuing to ensure all Americans have access to health insurance. Prior to the ACA, 47 million Americans were uninsured. Within that group, 12.6 million women of childbearing age were uninsured – that means women went without preventive care, well-woman exams, contraceptive counseling and cancer screening, or prenatal care which helps ensure healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. We've clearly outlined our joint principles by which we'll measure all reform proposals. Acceptable reform must continue to ensure access to comprehensive, safe, and affordable care. Acceptable reform must continue to ensure women are not denied coverage due to pre-existing conditions or charged more because they're women. Together, we urge Congress to retain these and other valuable patient protections, and not turn the clock back on women's health."

Ensure a viable health care safety net. The five organizations urged the senators to ensure that the basic functions of the safety net are universal and equitable for low-income children, youth and adults including those enrolled in Medicaid.

“Right now, the coverage rate among children in the US is at an historic high: 95 percent. Let me say that again: 95 percent,” said Fernando Stein, MD, president of the AAP. “The Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act have worked together to make this possible. As pediatricians, we know that health coverage provides children across the country with access to services they need to thrive, including life-saving vaccinations and well-child check-ups.”

Ensure vital patient protections in the health insurance marketplace. The organizations’ presidents called for health care legislation to continue current prohibitions against setting annual or lifetime benefit caps, denying or increasing premiums due to current or pre-existing conditions, eliminating coverage for essential evidence-based benefits that have been shown to improve health, and charging copayments, coinsurance or deductibles for covered preventive care.

“Our members all have cared for patients who have struggled with chronic health conditions or survived life-threatening illnesses,” said John Meigs, Jr., MD, president of the AAFP. “Without health care insurance that guarantees coverage for current or pre-existing conditions, our patients would have little or no access to the physicians and the care they need. Complications from their chronic conditions set in, and a once-productive worker becomes disabled. Or their chronic heart disease or a reoccurrence of cancer becomes a death sentence. Without health insurance that covers pre-existing conditions, these scenarios could become reality for millions of Americans.”

Ensure sufficient premium assistance and cost-sharing reduction subsidies to enable qualifying individuals to afford buying health care coverage and/or paying their deductibles and co-pays. Any proposals to alter such subsidies should provide, at minimum, comparable assistance especially for lower-income persons who otherwise would be unable to afford coverage and services, the organizations’ presidents urged the senators.

“As a primary care internist, I see first-hand how devastating it would be for my hard-working patients to return to the days when they had to go without health insurance. Without the access they’ve gained through the federal subsidies that help them afford the premiums and deductibles charged by commercial insurers, or the access they’ve gained through the expansions in my state’s Medicaid program, many of these patients would delay or forgo care, leading to potentially serious health consequences,” said Nitin S. Damle, MD, MS, MACP, president of ACP. “We urge Congress to first, do no harm to my patients by rolling back the positive gains we’ve seen in people’s ability to seek health care and have access to care that translates into a healthy life.”

Protect the individual and small group markets. The five presidents expressed deep concern that legislative actions could destabilize the insurance market and drive insurers out of the individual and small group markets. That would decrease access to health care coverage and raise costs for millions of people.

“Every new Congress has the opportunity to improve existing legislation. We are hopeful that lawmakers will continue or improve their constituents’ access to health care as they evolve the system in place today,” said William Burke, DO, board trustee for the AOA. “Keeping the emphasis on primary and preventative care is the best prescription for the nation. Our collective organizations seek proposals that ensure Americans can receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time… at a cost that people can afford.”

The messages taken to Capitol Hill reflect the five medical organizations' policies that have long supported access to meaningful, affordable health care coverage for all Americans. Preserving that access must be paramount in legislation that would change current law, the medical organizations' presidents said.

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About the American Academy of Family Physicians
Founded in 1947, the AAFP represents 124,900 physicians and medical students nationwide. It is the only medical society devoted solely to primary care.

Family physicians conduct approximately one in five office visits -- that's 192 million visits annually or 48 percent more than the next most visited medical specialty. Today, family physicians provide more care for America's underserved and rural populations than any other medical specialty. Family medicine's cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient-physician relationship focused on integrated care.

To learn more about the specialty of family medicine, the AAFP's positions (5 page PDF) on issues and clinical care, and for downloadable multi-media highlighting family medicine, visit www.aafp.org/media. For information about health care, health conditions and wellness, please visit the AAFP's award-winning consumer website, www.FamilyDoctor.org(www.familydoctor.org).

About the American Academy of Pediatrics
The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 66,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit www.aap.org and follow us on Twitter @AmerAcadPeds.

About the American College of Physicians
The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization in the United States with members in more than 145 countries worldwide. ACP membership includes 152,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness. Follow ACP on Twitter and Facebook.

About the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (The College), a 501(c)(3) organization, is the nation's leading group of physicians providing health care for women. As a private, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization of more than 58,000 members, The College strongly advocates for quality health care for women, maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members, promotes patient education, and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women's health care. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), a 501(c)(6) organization, is its companion.

About the American Osteopathic Association
The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) represents more than 129,000 osteopathic

physicians (DOs) and osteopathic medical students; promotes public health; encourages scientific research; serves as the primary certifying body for DOs; and is the accrediting agency for osteopathic medical schools. Visit DoctorsThatDO.org to learn more about osteopathic medicine.

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