ACP urges Congress to preserve and improve, not repeal, health reform law

Statement urges Congress to seek “common ground” on essential reforms and needed improvements

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The American College of Physicians (ACP) continues to firmly believe that the Affordable Care Act has essential policies to improve patient care by:

- Expanding coverage and improving Medicare benefits;
- Providing needed protections to guard against insurance practices that unfairly limit, deny or rescind coverage based on health status;
- Ensuring access to primary care physicians; and
- Beginning to bend the cost curve.

ACP believes that Congress should preserve and – as necessary – improve on these and other important reforms created by the Affordable Care Act, not repeal them.

Many of these improvements just went into effect last fall or on Jan. 1, and others will be phased in over the next several years. Such essential policies include, but are not limited to:

- Prohibiting insurers from excluding or charging excessive rates to children based on pre-existing conditions, which later will be expanded to all persons.
- Covering young adults on their parents' plans.
- Eliminating lifetime and annual limits on health insurance coverage.
- Requiring that health insurers spend more on patient care and less on administration.
- Phasing out the Medicare Part D doughnut hole.
- Eliminating patient cost-sharing for preventive services offered by Medicare or private insurers.
- Increasing Medicare and Medicaid payments to primary care physicians.
- Establishing a new Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to help physicians and patients make care decisions based on the best available evidence.
- Creating a new Center on Medicare and Medicaid Innovation to fund pilots of delivery models to improve outcomes and reduce costs, including patient-centered medical homes.
• Training more primary care physicians through the National Health Services Corps, Title VII health professions funding, and redistributing unused graduate medical education positions to primary care specialties facing shortages.
• Beginning in 2014, ensuring that nearly all Americans have access to coverage either through subsidized private health insurance offered by state health exchanges or through Medicaid, if they don’t already have access to coverage through an employer, Medicare, or another public program.

While, Republicans and Democrats have strong philosophical disagreements on the overall legislation, many of its key policies have had bipartisan support in the past and should continue to have bipartisan support going forward. For example, legislation to fund Medicare pilots of patient-centered medical homes initially originated in the 109th Congress when Republicans controlled both the House and the Senate. Training of more primary care physicians and improving reimbursement for their services; encouraging prevention and wellness; and funding pilots of reimbursement reforms to align incentives with better outcomes have had a long legacy of bipartisan support that ACP hopes can be sustained in the new 112th Congress.

Instead of passing the bill proposed by the House leadership to repeal these and other essential elements of the Affordable Care Act, ACP believes that Congress and the White House should work together to find effective ways to restrain cost growth and ensure effective implementation of the law. They should explore common ground for making improvements in the legislation, such as by enacting more effective medical liability reforms, ensuring that states are granted the flexibility and resources they need to effectively expand coverage, giving Congress more decision-making authority over recommendations from an independent payment advisory board, and replacing the cycle of Medicare physician payment cuts caused by the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) with a permanent solution. Other improvements should include removing or modifying the burdensome 1099 reporting requirement for small businesses and the requirement that physicians provide written authorization for over-the-counter medications reimbursed by a flexible spending account. Such improvements, though, should not compromise necessary funding for other essential policies in the ACA.

ACP is eager to work with both political parties to continue to advance reforms – based on long-standing ACP policies – to provide all Americans with access to affordable coverage, to ensure a sufficient and well-trained supply of primary care physicians and other specialties facing shortages, to improve payment and delivery systems to achieve better outcomes for patients, and to reform the broken medical liability system.

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The American College of Physicians is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 130,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internists specialize in the prevention, detection, and treatment of illness in adults. Follow ACP on Twitter and Facebook.