



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

July 17, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor, and
Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

The following members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) are writing to express our deep appreciation for the effort that has gone into getting the Affordable Health Choices Act successfully passed by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. This comprehensive health reform legislation represents a positive sea change that will significantly improve access to health and long term services and supports for people with disabilities and chronic conditions.

CCD, a coalition of national consumer, service provider and professional organizations, advocates on behalf of persons with disabilities and chronic conditions and their families. We believe that the goal of health care reform should be to assure that all Americans, including people with disabilities and chronic conditions, have access to high quality, comprehensive, affordable health care that meets their individual needs and enables them to be healthy, functional, live as independently as possible, and participate in the community. This measure goes a long way toward meeting that goal.

Many of the provisions will greatly improve the lives of people with disabilities and chronic conditions. In particular, we strongly support the insurance market reforms, including guaranteed issue and renewal of coverage in the individual and small group markets, the prohibition of pre-existing health condition exclusions, and the end of annual and lifetime insurance caps with a limit on out of pocket spending.

We greatly appreciate the bill's recognition of essential benefit categories that improve the ability of people with disabilities and chronic conditions to maintain and improve their functional ability. Specifically, we are most grateful for the Committee's inclusion of coverage of rehabilitation and habilitation "devices" as well as services in the essential benefits package. This statutory language establishes coverage for durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS) which are critical to the disability and chronic illness

population. The bill also covers as essential benefits rehabilitative, habilitative, and mental health and substance abuse services -- all of which are critical to enabling people with disabilities to function independently.

We also applaud the inclusion of the Community Living Assistance Supports and Services (CLASS) Act in the Affordable Health Choices Act. For persons with disabilities and chronically ill older Americans – arguably the most vulnerable populations in the nation – long term services and supports are their primary unmet care need, and are critical to promoting health and preventing illness. The landmark CLASS Act is the threshold to meaningful change ensuring that individuals are able to function as independently as possible within their homes, families, and their communities.

Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff to secure final passage of meaningful and comprehensive health reform legislation that meets the needs of all Americans this year.

Sincerely,

Academy for Educational Development
ACCSES

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Association on Health and Disability

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

American Foundation for the Blind

American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association

American Network of Community Options and Resources

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

Amputee Coalition of America

APSE

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Autism Society of America

Autism Speaks

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Brain Injury Association of America

Burton Blatt Institute

CHADD - Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Council for Exceptional Children

Council for Learning Disabilities

Council of Parent Attorney's and Advocates

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Easter Seals

Epilepsy Foundation

Family Voices

Helen Keller National Center

Higher Education Consortium for Special Education

Learning Disabilities Association of America
 Lutheran Services in America
 Mental Health America
 National Alliance on Mental Illness
 National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
 National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
 National Association of Social Workers
 National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services
 National Association of State Directors of Special Education
 National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
 National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
 National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
 National Council on Independent Living
 National Disability Institute
 National Disability Rights Network
 National Down Syndrome Congress
 National Down Syndrome Society
 National Multiple Sclerosis Society
 National Rehabilitation Association
 National Respite Coalition
 National Spinal Cord Injury Association
 Paralyzed Veterans of America
 RESNA – Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
 TASH
 Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
 The Arc of the United States
 United Cerebral Palsy
 United Jewish Communities
 United Spinal Association
 World Institute on Disability

For additional information, please contact any of the individuals below.

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- Suellen Galbraith, American Network of Community Options and Resources (703) 535-7850
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