

October 6, 2021

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Dear Chairman Wyden:

Thank you for all of your work to craft Budget Reconciliation legislation that will help struggling families in America gain access to affordable, comprehensive health insurance. With the clear support of President Biden and the commitment demonstrated by the House in marking up bold and comprehensive health provisions, we are confident that Congress is on a path to enacting landmark improvements in health coverage for millions of people across the country.

To fully realize the promise of these new coverage initiatives, however, Congress must also enact measures that would reach the millions of people who are eligible for coverage yet remain uninsured. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that 18 million out of America's nearly 30 million uninsured people qualify for health programs but are not enrolled, including 13 million who are eligible for free insurance.¹ Such programs include Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and advance premium tax credits (APTCs) to buy private insurance.

Notably, this enrollment gap disproportionately harms communities of color. Although people of color make up less than 40% of the country's population,² they comprise fully 52% of adults who are eligible for but not enrolled in Medicaid or in APTC-funded private insurance.³ And almost two-thirds (64%) of the nearly 2.4 million uninsured children who qualify for Medicaid or CHIP are Latino, African-American, or other children of color.

Today, we write to offer a solution that will strengthen Build Back Better legislation by making it easier for the 18 uninsured million people who are eligible for Medicaid, CHIP, or APTCs to enroll.

Specifically, we urge you to include a provision in the Build Back Better Act that would replicate innovative enrollment methods that a number of states have recently adopted on a bipartisan basis. Beginning with Maryland in 2019, an array of states, including Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, are giving uninsured taxpayers the option to have their state tax return information shared with the health insurance marketplace to see if they qualify for free or low-cost health insurance. If a similar policy is enacted federally, millions of uninsured families who know little about health programs could check a box on their tax returns, learn that they qualify for affordable health care, and quickly enroll.

Such an approach would be highly effective in shrinking the enrollment gap for several reasons:

- **Most uninsured file tax returns.** In 2019, 80% of all uninsured citizens and lawfully present immigrants filed returns, including 64% of those with incomes below 150% of poverty.⁴
- **Tax filing could reach millions of uninsured people who know little or nothing about health programs.** In 2017, despite ample public education and the completion of four open enrollment periods, 40% of uninsured people were still unaware of health insurance marketplaces.⁵ As of 2020, only 22% of people without health insurance knew the ACA was still in effect.⁶

As you know, Senator Van Hollen will shortly introduce Easy Enrollment legislation, which would let uninsured taxpayers use their federal income tax returns to seek expedited and even automatic

enrollment into coverage. Key pieces of that legislation could be added to the Build Back Better Act, making a meaningful difference in closing the enrollment gap.

You and your colleagues are working hard to extend the benefits of affordable, high-quality health insurance to millions in America who lack it today. For those important measures to fully achieve their goals, we urge you to take this one additional step to help people who qualify get enrolled in coverage.

Sincerely,

The Association for Community Affiliated Plans

The Alliance of Community Health Plans

The American Heart Association

Community Catalyst

Families USA

First Focus on Children

The National Health Council

Third Way

CC: Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Senator Crapo, Chairman Murray, Senator Burr, Chairman Pallone, Chairman Neal, Representative Brady, and Representative Rodgers

¹ Matthew Rae, Cynthia Cox, Gary Claxton, Daniel McDermott, and Anthony Damico. "How the American Rescue Plan Act Affects Subsidies for Marketplace Shoppers and People Who Are Uninsured." The Kaiser Family Foundation, March 25, 2021. <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/how-the-american-rescue-plan-act-affects-subsidies-for-marketplace-shoppers-and-people-who-are-uninsured/>

² Nicholas Jones, Rachel Marks, Roberto Ramirez, and Merarys Ríos-Vargas. "2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country." U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, August 12, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html>.

³ Unpublished analysis by the National Center for Coverage Innovation at Families USA (NCCI) of 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, made available through IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org (IPUMS). This estimate understates the prevalence of people of color, relative to the Census Bureau's 2020 population-wide estimate, for two reasons: It reflects 2019 conditions, the most recent year for which ACS data available, rather than 2020 conditions; and the more recent Census Bureau findings reflect methods for analyzing race and ethnicity that are more sensitive than those used in the ACS.

⁴ Unpublished NCCI analysis of 2020 March Current Population Survey data, available through IPUMS.

⁵ Sara R. Collins, Munira Z. Gunja, and Michelle M. Doty. "Following the ACA Repeal-and-Replace Effort, Where Does the U.S. Stand on Insurance Coverage?" The Commonwealth Fund, September 2017. https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/media_files_publications_issue_brief_2017_sep_collins_2017_aca_tracking_survey_ib_v2.pdf

⁶ 13% thought the ACA had been overturned, and 63% were unsure. Kaiser Family Foundation. "Topline: KFF Consumer Assistance Survey 2020." August 7, 2020. <https://files.kff.org/attachment/Topline-KFF-Consumer-Assistance-Survey-2020.pdf>