

January 12, 2011

The Honorable John A. Boehner
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, (NASW) and our 145,000 members, I am writing to express social workers' strong opposition to legislation that would repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Social workers strongly support the new law because it makes vital improvements to health care access, quality and services for millions of Americans with health and behavioral needs. We ask you to strongly support implementation of the new law as vital to advance the health and behavioral needs of our nation.

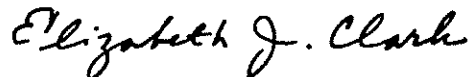
Social workers practice as part of health care teams, and they are specifically trained to address the psychosocial implications of acute and chronic illnesses. They are the largest providers of mental health services in the United States, and they practice across the continuum of care including community and public health clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, home health care, primary care, veteran service networks, and hospices. The new law contains many key provisions that address critical changes social workers believe are needed to improve the public's health, and, specifically, to start moving towards a system that focuses on keeping people healthy and is affordable for all. Among the most important provisions in this bill are:

- Improved insurance affordability and reduced premium increases for tens of millions of Americans and small business owners who are increasingly priced out of coverage today.
- Essential insurance market reforms to prohibit pre-existing conditions exclusions and annual or lifetime limits, provision of guaranteed issue and renewal requirements, and allowance for dependent young adults to remain on parental coverage to age 26.
- Health plan benefits that include mandatory mental health, substance use, rehabilitation, habilitation, prescription drug and preventive services. Plans sold in the new insurance exchanges will include mental health and substance use benefits at parity levels.
- Integration of behavioral health services into primary care with the establishment of interdisciplinary health teams to support primary care practices.
- Extension of Medicaid eligibility to individuals up to 133% of the federal poverty level, including childless single adults.

- Coverage of long-term services through the new Community Living Assistance Services and Supports national insurance program and Community First Choice Medicaid Option to help individuals with disabilities and long-term care needs to receive essential care at home or in the community.
- Strengthening of the health care workforce, including beginning to address the education and training needs of social workers. Workforce development programs in mental health and behavioral health education will assist social work students specializing in and providing services to special high needs populations such as children, the aged and underserved minority populations.

Social workers acknowledge the new law will not correct all the defects in our current health system, but the law is a major step forward while we continue to advocate for an equitable health care system for every American. We urge House rejection of this very harmful legislation and eagerly await the day when the law is fully implemented, providing access to high quality, affordable health care for millions more Americans. We appreciate your consideration of our views and look forward to working with you on these issues in the 112th Congress.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH
Executive Director