

May 20, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus  
United States Senate  
Committee on Finance  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
United States Senate  
Committee on Finance  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus and Senator Grassley:

Re: Comments on the Senate Finance Committee's *Description of Policy Options – Expanding Health Care Coverage: Proposals to Provide Affordable Coverage to All Americans*

On behalf of Partnership for Prevention®, a nonpartisan national membership organization dedicated to the adoption of sound disease prevention and health promotion policies and practices, I would like to commend you for your dedicated efforts to promote health and wellness for all Americans.

Partnership for Prevention fully supports the prevention and wellness policies as described in the Senate Finance Committee's, *Description of Policy Options – Expanding Health Care Coverage: Proposals to Provide Affordable Coverage to All Americans*, Section VI issued on May 14, 2009.

Several of the provisions set forth in the white paper are in line with Partnership's recommendations to the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to increase our health system's emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention. For the past two decades, Partnership has strongly advocated for policies to make proven clinical preventive services accessible to all by increasing coverage and eliminating financial barriers, encouraging patients to use preventive services, and rewarding employers for their active engagement in employee health promotion. Partnership also supports efforts to create healthy environments and promote healthy lifestyles by furthering community preventive services and worksite health promotion programs and the coordination of both with clinical preventive services. Partnership has long promoted including prevention in the workplace through our *Leading by Example* CEO to CEO Initiative. Through *Leading by Example*, Partnership marshals the influence of CEO's to encourage investment in employee wellness.

The policy options described in the paper provide a solid foundation to create a health system that focuses on keeping healthy people healthy. In addition to options in the paper, scientific evidence supports the expansion of the following three policies:

- **Promotion of Prevention and Wellness in Medicare: Personalized Prevention Plan and Routine Wellness Visit**

The proposed comprehensive health risk assessment followed by a visit to a qualified health professional would provide an opportunity to offer important and individualized preventive care. Allowing the Secretary to design the comprehensive health risk assessment in consultation with other groups, such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, will ensure that the assessment is evidence-based and a valuable tool to improve health. Recognizing the dynamic state of health, Partnership also agrees with the Committee's recommendation to offer this benefit every five years.

Additionally, the personalized prevention plan and routine wellness visit precludes the need for the current "Welcome to Medicare" visit (WMV). As described, the new visit incorporates most of the WMV requirements and includes additional important prevention benefits, particularly within the detailed prevention plan. Thus, retaining the WMV after the establishment of this new option makes the WMV redundant, costly, and unnecessary. By incorporating a health risk assessment, a comprehensive prevention plan, and 5 year periodicity, all with no cost-sharing, the Committee has produced an excellent replacement to the current WMV.

- **Promotion of Prevention and Wellness in Medicare: Incentives to Utilize Preventive Services and Engage in Healthy Behaviors**

Research shows that eliminating cost-sharing increases utilization of effective clinical preventive services. Removing or limiting cost-sharing for services rated "A" or "B" by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force would certainly improve health. In addition, though, the Senate Finance Committee should consider recommending the removal of cost-sharing for all appropriate immunizations (i.e., recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices [ACIP]). Thousands of older adults die or have serious complications from vaccine-preventable diseases every year so it is important that cost barriers do not dissuade Medicare beneficiaries from receiving immunizations.

- **Promotion of Prevention and Wellness in Medicaid: Access to Preventive Services for Eligible Adults**

As the Committee correctly identified, tobacco cessation is not only a cost effective clinical preventive service but it addresses one of the leading causes of premature death and preventable illness. The Public Health Service found that there is strong evidence to recommend that all patients be screened for tobacco use and offered assistance to quit. Due to the grave health risks of tobacco use and strong evidence that tobacco dependence treatments are effective, we recommend that coverage of tobacco cessation services be required for all Medicaid beneficiaries, not just for pregnant women.

The Public Health Service's Clinical Practice Guideline, *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update* is available at: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/>.

The enclosed articles provide support for the effectiveness of the policies included in the white paper and the additional policies discussed above. This documentation makes a compelling argument to include these policies in the Senate Finance Committee's final health reform legislation.

I appreciate your leadership and thank you for putting forth these important and timely policies to provide affordable coverage to all Americans. The white paper provides evidence-based options for Congress to consider in drafting comprehensive health reform legislation. We are now more confident than ever that health reform *will* start with prevention.

Thank you for providing Partnership an opportunity to comment on this proposal. If you have questions regarding any of these issues or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [chusten@prevent.org](mailto:chusten@prevent.org) or 202-833-0009.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Corinne G. Husten, MD, MPH". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Corinne G. Husten, MD, MPH  
Chief Policy and Program Officer

Enclosures (4)