



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester  
 United States House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Blunt Rochester:

We write in strong support of the Quit Because of COVID-19 Act, legislation that will ensure that all Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollees have access to the full array of evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments at this critical time. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smokers are at increased risk of severe complications from COVID-19, a pandemic disproportionately impacting communities of color and other vulnerable populations. Smoking rates are particularly high among people enrolled in Medicaid. Helping tobacco users to quit should be a critical component of the nation’s efforts to combat this deadly pandemic.

Tobacco use is a key driver of poor health outcomes and health costs for Medicaid. Medicaid enrollees smoke at more than twice the rate of adults with private health insurance, which increases their risk of

cancer, cardiovascular disease, COPD, diabetes, and other tobacco-caused diseases. In addition to harming health, high rates of tobacco use also lead to higher health care costs. Smoking-related diseases account for approximately \$39 billion in annual Medicaid costs.

With the COVID-19 pandemic currently confronting our nation, there has never been a more important time to help tobacco users to quit. Smoking weakens the immune system and increases the risk of respiratory infections. Many of the underlying health conditions that place individuals at greater risk for severe complications from COVID-19 are often caused by tobacco use. There is also growing evidence that e-cigarette use can harm lung health.

Most tobacco users want to quit, and Medicaid and CHIP enrollees who use tobacco products should have access to treatments that give them the best chance to quit successfully. That is especially true during a pandemic of an infectious disease that primarily attacks the lungs. But while all states provide some level of tobacco cessation coverage for Medicaid enrollees, many state Medicaid programs do not cover all evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments and include barriers, like cost sharing and prior authorization requirements, to accessing coverage. In 2018, only 15 states covered all 7 FDA-approved tobacco cessation medications as well as group and individual cessation counseling, and only two of these states covered all treatments without barriers to access.

Your bill addresses these gaps in coverage by extending comprehensive tobacco cessation coverage to all Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries. It would also reduce barriers to accessing this coverage by eliminating cost sharing and prior authorization requirements. For the duration of the public health emergency and the two-year period that follows, the bill would provide enhanced federal funding to cover the full cost of the benefit as well as state outreach campaigns to educate providers and Medicaid and CHIP enrollees about the benefit.

Expanding coverage of tobacco cessation treatments can pay dividends in terms of improved health and lower health care costs. After Massachusetts expanded its Medicaid tobacco cessation coverage and conducted a campaign to educate Medicaid enrollees and providers about the enhanced coverage, smoking rates among Medicaid recipients decreased from 38 percent to 28 percent over a two-and-a-half year period. Every dollar the state invested in its Medicaid tobacco cessation benefit and awareness campaign resulted in \$3.12 in health care savings from reduced hospitalizations.

Quitting is one of the most important actions tobacco users can take to improve their health, and Medicaid and CHIP should assist enrollees who want to quit. We applaud you for introducing legislation that would ensure that all Medicaid and CHIP enrollees have barrier-free coverage of evidence-based tobacco cessation treatments. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Academy of General Dentistry

Action on Smoking & Health

African American Tobacco Control  
Leadership Council

Allergy & Asthma Network

American Academy of Dental Group  
Practice

American Academy of Nursing

American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial  
Pathology

American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology

American Academy of Oral Medicine

American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association for Cancer Research

American Association for Dental Research

American Association for Respiratory Care

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American College Health Association

American Dental Association

American Federation of School Administrators

American Heart Association

American Lung Association

American Public Health Association

American Society of Addiction Medicine

American Society of Clinical Oncology

American Thoracic Society

Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights

Association for the Treatment of Tobacco Use and Dependence

Association of Black Cardiologists

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH)

Common Sense

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)

COPD Foundation

Eta Sigma Gamma - National Health Education Honorary

First Focus Campaign for Children

Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of School Nurses

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of Social Workers

National Education Association

National Hispanic Medical Association

National Network of Public Health Institutes

North American Quitline Consortium

Oncology Nursing Society

Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes (PAVe)

Public Health Solutions

Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions

Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco

Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons