

May 16, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
House Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

**On behalf of 125 national and state organizations representing patients, families, health care providers, public health experts, and others, we urge Congress to act swiftly to restore essential support for access to COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines.** As bipartisan negotiations regarding additional funding for the COVID-19 response continue, Congress must include measures to ensure that everyone, regardless of insurance status, can continue to access lifesaving vaccines, testing, and treatment. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) COVID-19 Uninsured Program is critical to support these services and urgently requires funding.

Originally established by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and most recently funded as part of the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021, the HRSA COVID-19 Uninsured Program reimburses health care providers who render COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccine services to uninsured individuals.<sup>1</sup> The program has provided essential mitigation measures to lessen the harm and scope of the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that cost sharing does not prevent individuals from seeking vaccination, testing, and treatment. Since its inception, the Uninsured Program has paid for more than 30,000 COVID-19 tests, treatment for more than 34,000 individuals, and for the administration of more than 18,000 COVID vaccines.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, due to insufficient funds, HRSA has been unable to process claims for testing and treatment since March 22 and stopped accepting claims for vaccinations on April 5.

Sustained and adequate funding is essential for the federal government and public health agencies to support the country's ongoing efforts to prevent and mitigate the harmful effects of COVID-19. Without the HRSA Uninsured Program, uninsured Americans have already begun losing access to testing, treatment, and vaccination services, placing themselves and other members of their communities at risk of infection. Unless Congress acts, this lack of funding will only exacerbate existing racial and ethnic disparities in access to health services for historically marginalized communities. For example, Latino children and families are much more likely to be uninsured compared to their white counterparts<sup>3</sup> and have disproportionately suffered from the

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Claims Reimbursement to Health Care Providers and Facilities for Testing, Treatment, and Vaccine Administration for the Uninsured. <https://www.hrsa.gov/CovidUninsuredClaim>

<sup>2</sup> HHS COVID-19 Funding, Testing, Treatment, and Vaccine Administration for the Uninsured, accessed May 3, 2022 from <https://taggs.hhs.gov/Coronavirus/Uninsured>

<sup>3</sup> Whitener, Kelly, Snider, Matthew. "Expanding Medicaid Would Help Close Coverage Gap for Latino Children and Parents." *Center For Children and Families*, 29 June 2021, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2021/06/29/expanding-medicaid-would-help-close-coverage-gap-for-latino-children-and-parents/>.

health and economic consequences of the virus.<sup>4,5</sup> Similarly, Black communities have been overrepresented in the essential workforce before and during the pandemic, have suffered a disproportionate share of deaths from the disease, and are also more likely to be uninsured than their white counterparts.<sup>6,7,8</sup> For uninsured individuals, the HRSA Uninsured Program has been one of the only means of accessing COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination services regardless of immigration status. Failing to adequately fund the HRSA Uninsured Program not only places these communities at greater risk, but also risks undoing the progress that has been made toward equitable access to COVID-19 services, including vaccines.

Furthermore, the HRSA Uninsured Program has acted as a lifeline for safety net providers across the country, many already operating on thin margins and grappling with severe workforce shortages. Without a commitment from Congress to restore the program, these providers will be forced to absorb the additional costs or make tough decisions about limiting the COVID-19 services they provide to uninsured individuals, potentially decreasing access to care and leaving our nation unprepared for future variants and surges.<sup>9</sup>

This threat is particularly concerning as the nation prepares for the new availability of a COVID-19 vaccine for children younger than five years of age. If and when the FDA issues an emergency use authorization for a vaccine for this population, the HRSA Uninsured Program must be operational to ensure access for uninsured young children and their caregivers.

Individual states currently have the option to provide Medicaid coverage for COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination to uninsured individuals who meet Medicaid's non-financial eligibility requirements, with full federal funding for those costs by filing a Disaster Relief State Plan Amendment with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).<sup>10</sup> However, this option excludes some uninsured individuals, and is only available through the end of the month in which the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) ends – at present, through July 15, 2022. The limited eligibility, short duration, continued uncertainty, and bureaucratic complexity of this pathway make the state option to cover COVID-19 services for uninsured individuals

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<sup>4</sup> “Covid-19 Provisional Counts - Health Disparities.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Apr. 2022, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsr/covid19/health\\_disparities.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsr/covid19/health_disparities.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Despres, Cliff. “Update: Coronavirus Case Rates and Death Rates for Latinos in the United States.” *Salud America*, 19 Apr. 2022, <https://salud-america.org/coronavirus-case-rates-and-death-rates-for-latinos-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>6</sup> Tomer A and JW Kane, “To protect frontline workers during and after COVID-19, we must define who they are.” Brookings Institute, 10 June 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/to-protect-frontline-workers-during-and-after-covid-19-we-must-define-who-they-are/>.

<sup>7</sup> Hill L and S Artiga, “COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by Race/Ethnicity: Current Data and Changes Over Time.” Kaiser Family Foundation, February 2022. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-by-race-ethnicity-current-data-and-changes-over-time/>.

<sup>8</sup> Artiga S, L Hill, K Orgera, and A Damico. “Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2019,” Kaiser Family Foundation, July 2021. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/health-coverage-by-race-and-ethnicity/>

<sup>9</sup> The White House Fact Sheet: Consequences of Lack of Funding for Efforts to Combat Covid-19 if Congress Does not Act. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/15/fact-sheet-consequences-of-lack-of-funding-for-efforts-to-combat-covid-19-if-congress-does-not-act/>.

<sup>10</sup> Tolbert, Jennifer et al. “Implications of the Lapse in Federal Covid-19 Funding on Access to Covid-19 Testing, Treatment, and Vaccines.” *KFF*, 28 Mar. 2022, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/implications-of-the-lapse-in-federal-covid-19-funding-on-access-to-covid-19-testing-treatment-and-vaccines/>.

challenging to implement and likely to exacerbate inequitable access to services: a national solution is called for.

Protecting the health and wellbeing of all communities as next phase of the pandemic unfolds requires lawmakers to prioritize the policies and programs that have shown to have the greatest impact. Congress must act urgently to restore the COVID-19 Uninsured Program to fulfill the promise of access to testing, treatment, and vaccinations without cost-sharing.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this issue further, please contact Stephanie Glier at the American Academy of Pediatrics at [sglier@aap.org](mailto:sglier@aap.org).

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics  
ACA Consumer Advocacy  
Academic Pediatric Association  
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth  
& Families  
AIDS Foundation Chicago  
AIDS United  
Alianto Education Fund  
ALL In Education  
Allegany Franciscan Ministries  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
American College of Obstetricians and  
Gynecologists  
American College of Physicians  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Pediatric Society  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
(APIAHF)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health  
Organizations (AAPCHO)  
Association of Medical School Pediatric  
Department Chairs  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Be a Hero  
Broward for Progress  
California Chapter 1 of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics  
California Chapter 3 of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics

California Immigrant Policy Center  
California Primary Care Association  
Casa San Jose  
Catalyst Miami  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's Action Alliance  
Children's Health Fund  
Children's Hospital Association  
Colorado Consumer Health Initiative  
Community Catalyst  
Community Health Plan of Washington  
Community Service Society of NY  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good  
Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Democratic Disability Caucus of Florida  
Enlace Chicago  
Equality California  
Erie Family Health Centers  
F2FHIC American Samoa  
Family Voices  
Family Voices NJ  
Farmworker Justice  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Florida Chapter of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics  
Florida Health Justice Project  
Florida Policy Institute  
Florida Voices for Health  
Foundation for Healthy Generations  
Georgia Watch

Georgians for a Healthy Future  
 Health & Medicine Policy Research Group  
 Heart of Florida United Way  
 Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)  
 Illinois Primary Health Care Association  
 Immunize.org  
 Justice in Aging  
 Kentucky Voices for Health  
 Legal Council for Health Justice  
 Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Maine Parent Federation  
 Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Michigan Family Voices  
 MomsRising  
 Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
 National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
 National Association of Counties  
 National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
 National Black Midwives Alliance  
 National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)  
 National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities (CNLD)  
 National Consumers League  
 National Council of Urban Indian Health  
 National Health Law Program  
 National Immigration Law Center  
 National League for Nursing  
 North Carolina Pediatric Society  
 Nebraska Appleseed  
 NETWORK Lobby of Catholic Social Justice  
 Nevada Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics  
 New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 New York Chapter 3 of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 North Carolina AIDS Action Network  
 Northwest Health Law Advocates  
 Oasis Legal Services  
 Oklahoma Policy Institute  
 OneAmerica  
 Oregon Pediatric Society  
 Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Parent Information Center of Delaware  
 Pediatric Policy Council  
 Prevention Institute  
 PTI Nebraska  
 Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 RIP Medical Debt  
 Shriver Center on Poverty Law  
 Silver State Equality  
 Society for Pediatric Research  
 South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center  
 South Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project  
 SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)  
 Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
 Tennessee Health Care Campaign  
 Tennessee Justice Center  
 Texas Pediatric Society  
 The Arc Michigan  
 The Arizona Partnership for Immunization  
 The Children's Partnership  
 The Parents' Place of MD  
 The Workers Circle  
 TODEC Legal Center  
 Trust for America's Health  
 UnidosUS  
 Unitarian Universalist Justice Florida  
 United Way of Broward County  
 Vermont Family Network  
 Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics