



American Heart Association | American Stroke Association

Learn and Live

Heart Disease and Stroke. You're the Cure.

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*"Building healthier lives,
Free of cardiovascular
Diseases and stroke."*

March 23, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

The American Heart Association (AHA) has long recognized that meaningful, comprehensive health care reform is critical to meet the needs of patients with heart disease and stroke and their families. We believe the final health reform package would make significant progress towards the Association's core principles for reform by ensuring affordable, quality health care for more Americans. We urge all Senators to understand the urgency of the need and vote in support of the final legislation.

While acknowledging that such a complex piece of legislation like the final health reform package isn't perfect, the AHA believes it makes a number of important improvements to our current health care system that we can build on in the years to come. The final package enacts important insurance reforms, increases affordability, emphasizes value over volume, promotes quality over quantity and thus addresses the cost curve, and of particular importance to the AHA, the legislation places a greater emphasis on prevention and wellness.

A recent AHA survey of heart disease and stroke patients serves as a sober reminder of the struggles that too many of them face in the current health care system. More than half of those surveyed said they had difficulties paying for medical care, even though most of them had insurance, and even more troubling, 46% of those who had difficulty paying their medical expenses said they had delayed getting needed care. Attached is a summary of this survey for your review.

Our current system, if left unchanged, is simply untenable for too many Americans and clearly unsustainable for all Americans. As we continue to deliberate these issues, more patients are dying, more citizens go without needed cost-effective preventive care and more families face bankruptcy. The time has come. Without reform, the problems that heart disease and stroke patients face in the current system will clearly worsen: an additional 20 million Americans are expected to lose their insurance coverage over the next decade; health care costs are projected to nearly double; and Medicare's trust fund will become insolvent in seven short years. We view the enactment of health care reform as a significant step forward but not the end of the process. The AHA is committed to continuing to work with Congress, the Administration and our partners in the public and private sectors to monitor and implement reform and to further improve upon the health care system.

Working on behalf of the more than 81 million Americans living with heart disease and stroke, we implore the Senate to seize this opportunity to enact meaningful health care reform and embrace this generational moment to fundamentally transform the health and well-being of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Neil M. Meltzer, MPH
Chairman of the Board

Clyde W. Yancy, MD, FAHA
President

Cc: All Senators