



From the Editor

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Healthcare: It's 'So Complicated'

Indeed, healthcare is, in the new president's words, "so complicated." Early in the transition, there was talk that some parts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) might be retained, such as the prohibition of denial of coverage because of a pre-existing condition. However, to date, the administration has not unveiled a concrete plan to abolish the ACA and replace it with a plan Congress considers more beneficial and cost-effective for Americans.

In January, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) (2017) released a report concerning the impact of changing the ACA. Previously, the CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation estimated the budgetary effects of the proposed Restoring Americans' Healthcare Freedom Reconciliation Act of 2015, which would eliminate the law's mandate penalties and subsidies but leave the ACA's insurance market reforms in place. They offered a partial assessment of how the legislation would affect health insurance coverage, but did not go as far as to estimate the changes in coverage or premiums that would result from leaving the market reforms in place while repealing the mandated penalties and subsidies.

The new report, *How Repealing Portions of the Affordable Care Act Would Affect Health Insurance Coverage and Premiums*, provides this assessment (CBO, 2017). The legislation would affect insurance coverage and premiums in the following ways:

- In the first new plan year following enactment of the bill, the number of people who are uninsured would increase by 18 million. That number would increase to 27 million and then to 32 million in 2026, following the elimination of the ACA's expansion of Medicaid eligibility and of subsidies for insurance purchased

through the ACA marketplaces.

- Premiums for individual policies purchased through the marketplaces or directly from insurers would increase by 20% to 25% in the first new plan year, reaching about 50% in the year following the elimination of the Medicaid expansion and the marketplace subsidies, and premiums would near double by 2026.

Responses from the Healthcare Community

The nursing community weighed in early. American Nurses Association (ANA) President Pam Cipriano, PhD, RN, said she does not want to see the ACA replaced quickly with a poorly conceived plan just to make good on a campaign promise to do a repeal and replace in the first 100 days (Frellick, 2017). She further emphasized that any conversations about replacing the ACA should involve nurses, adding:

We want to hold the president to his word that he will listen to all Americans and that includes the 3.6 million registered nurses, who have solutions to improve healthcare. We want him to listen to all people... and Tweet less (Frellick, 2017).

In February, representatives from 40 nursing organizations (see Figure 1) called on the administration and Congress to prioritize patient health and the patient-provider relationship in any healthcare reform proposals (The Street, 2017). The organizations affirmed their shared commitment to advance patient-centered healthcare and healthcare policies that reflect the following:

- *Ensure patients access to health care with affordable coverage options, regardless of their preexisting conditions.*

- *Uphold the principles of including essential health benefits, including providing patients with access to ambulatory care, emergency services, hospitalization, maternity and newborn care, mental health services and addiction treatment, prescription drugs, rehabilitative services and devices, laboratory services, preventive services, wellness services and chronic disease management, and pediatric services.*
- *Protect patients' access to receive health care delivered by the provider of their choice, including advanced practice registered nurses, which include, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, midwives and nurse anesthetists, and ensure this care is covered by their insurer.*
- *Maintain the nation's commitment to strengthen its health care workforce.*
- *Create greater efficiency in the Medicare system by retiring barriers to practice and eliminate duplication of health care providers' efforts.*

During the campaign, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released its transition plan for the next administration, *Blueprint for Children: How the Next President Can Build a Foundation for a Healthy Future*. The document emphasizes the need for the administration to direct all federal agencies to conduct a top-to-bottom review of how their activities can maintain progress made to date and boldly and proactively strive to better children's lives:

This review should analyze rules, regulations, policies, funding, and programs across the federal government that affect children, families, communities, and our nation's role as a leader for child health. It should then provide the basis for an intentional plan involving all federal

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Figure 1.
Nursing Organizations Calling on Trump Administration and Congress

Academy of Neonatal Nursing	Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
American Academy of Nursing	Emergency Nurses Association
American Association of Colleges of Nursing	Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses	Infusion Nurses Society
American Association of Neuroscience Nurses	International Association of Forensic Nurses
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists	National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists
American Association of Nurse Practitioners	National Association of Neonatal Nurses
American Association of Occupational Health Nurses	National Association of Neonatal Nurse Practitioners
American College of Nurse-Midwives	National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
American Holistic Nurses Association	National Association of School Nurses
American Nephrology Nurses Association	National Council of State Boards of Nursing
American Nurses Association	National Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers
American Organization of Nurse Executives	National League for Nursing
American Pediatric Surgical Nurses Association	National Student Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association	Oncology Nursing Society
American Society for Pain Management Nursing	Organization for Associate Degree Nursing
American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition	Rheumatology Nurses Society
Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses	Society of Pediatric Nurses
Association of periOperative Registered Nurses	The National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties
Association of Public Health Nurses	
Association of Rehabilitation Nurses	

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*stakeholders to promote **healthy children** by supporting **secure families**, building **strong communities**, and ensuring that the U.S. is a **leading nation** for all children. To achieve this, there will need to be new programs, enhancements to existing ones where the current policies are insufficient, and better coordination across the federal government among programs that impact children (AAP, 2016, p. 5).*

The blueprint further explains that the administration must convene and engage with child health experts in this effort. This will ensure that the plan meets the most pressing needs of children and families, and includes multi-sector collaboration. Two pediatric organizations that endorse the document are the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and the Society of Pediatric Nurses.

The People Speak

As conversations at the Capitol and The White House continue about cutting this and taxing that, the public is becoming more aware of the changes being considered in health-care reform and what these changes

might mean to their families. During recent town hall meetings, Americans – both Democrats and Republicans – asked questions of Members of Congress about the administration's healthcare plan. Even Americans not originally in favor of the ACA are now reluctant to give up benefits, such as the ability to get insurance with a pre-existing condition or the ability to keep their adult children on their policies until age 26.

On March 6, 2017, the administration proposed to repeal and replace the ACA with the American Health Care Act (AHCA). The following week, the Congressional Budget Committee released its report that if the AHCA were enacted, about 14 million more Americans would be uninsured, jumping to 24 million more in nine years. So much opposition arose from both sides of the aisle that House Speaker Paul Ryan, knowing the votes weren't there for passage, pulled the bill off the floor moments before a scheduled vote.

Meanwhile, in this time of uncertainty, some health insurance companies have pulled out of the ACA and others are considering doing so. These events shift the financial picture and add to more confusion, fear, and frustration for Americans deserving and in need of comprehensive, affordable healthcare. ■

References

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Additional Reading

- American Nurses Association (ANA). (2016). *ANA's principles for health system transformation 2016*. Retrieved from <http://nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/Policy-Advocacy/HealthSystemReform/Principles-HealthSystemTransformation.pdf>