

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
354 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 22, 2017

Dear Senator Gardner:

As the U.S. Senate draws nearer to introducing legislation aimed at substantially changing our national health policy framework, we are concerned about reports of plans to move quickly in voting on a bill without states and stakeholders receiving adequate time to carefully consider the details of the policy. Without having draft legislation from the U.S. Senate to analyze and respond to, we are resending a set of shared principles for health reform established by Colorado stakeholders and urge you to evaluate any and all proposals against these principles.

We are a broad and diverse group, which has come together because we know health care policy is critical to the wellbeing of Colorado residents, businesses and communities. We are working to ensure that Colorado values are reflected in any policy that moves forward and offer ourselves as a resource to you, our Colorado representatives, in evaluating and understanding how any proposal might impact Colorado.

As a first step in our efforts, this winter a broad and diverse group of stakeholders agreed upon and shared with you a set of clear principles on both the process Congress should follow to bring about any changes as well as the goals for the policies ultimately adopted. Our positions on process included requests that Congress move forward only once a clearly identified and carefully considered, comprehensive plan is identified and ideally supported in a bipartisan manner. We urge you to insist on and foster procedural transparency and allow adequate time for consideration of all significant proposals before the Senate is asked to vote.

Compounding these broader transparency and accountability concerns are two issues particular to Colorado that we hope you, as our elected representative, will take into special consideration. First, given our unique state budgetary constraints, Colorado is particularly vulnerable to changes in federal policy that shift financial responsibility to state budgets. The Colorado Health Institute's analysis of the U.S. House version of the American Health Care Act shows that Colorado would lose \$14 billion in federal funding over 10 years. That is a loss of federal funding that would devastate our state's budget – not just in health care, but in other priority areas such as education and transportation as well. As Colorado's representatives in the U.S. Senate, we urge you not to support policies that shift financial responsibility to the states without adequate and sustained federal funding.

Second, Colorado has significant geographic diversity across our state that creates differences in how health care is paid for and delivered in rural and urban communities. While this letter does not address all those complexities, we do want to highlight that the Medicaid changes proposed in the American Health Care Act would have significant impacts statewide and be particularly impactful to our rural

communities. This is because Colorado’s rural communities rely on Medicaid as a source of coverage at higher rates than our urban communities. On average 26 percent of Colorado’s rural population is covered by Medicaid and in nine rural counties, Medicaid is the source of coverage for more than 40 percent of the population. As such, Medicaid is a critical financial support to rural hospitals, clinics and Coloradans enrolled in Medicaid. Further, we know that the health care industry is a primary source of good-paying jobs in many areas, and Medicaid cuts that hurt rural health care providers will have ripple impacts across the economies of rural communities. Roll-back of the Medicaid expansion or substantial changes to program eligibility and financing, as proposed in the American Health Care Act, will disproportionately impact rural Colorado.

We know you are well aware of these pressing challenges Colorado faces, but we urge your thoughtful consideration throughout deliberations of potential federal legislation – especially if time is short and outside organizations are not given the full opportunity to provide such feedback once the bill is drafted and made public. Please see our complete list of policy priorities below.

As a broad and diverse group of organizations, we appreciate the challenges you face in reforming our nation’s health care policy framework and we want to stand with you in meeting those challenges. We realize that not all of us will ultimately agree with every element of any policy proposal considered or ultimately adopted. But we are unanimous in our support of a process that gives Congress the benefit of public participation and open debate, as any robust democracy requires. In our current landscape of deep partisan divides and entrenched positions, this area of common agreement should serve as a signal to Congress.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Recovery Colorado

All Kids Covered Colorado

Alliance

American Academy of Pediatrics - Colorado Chapter

Association for Community Living in Boulder & Broomfield County

Atlantis Community Inc

Boulder Community Health

Boulder County Board of County Commissioners

Caring for Colorado Foundation

Center for Health Progress

Children's Hospital Colorado

Chronic Care Collaborative

Colorado Academy of Family Physicians

Colorado Access

Colorado AFL-CIO

Colorado Association of Health Plans

Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials

Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Society

Colorado Children's Campaign

Colorado Community Health Network

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative

Colorado Cross Disability Coalition

Colorado Fiscal Institute

Colorado Hospital Association

Colorado Medical Society

Colorado Psychiatric Society

Colorado School Medicaid Consortium

Community Care Alliance

Denver Health and Hospital Authority

Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce

Dolores County Health Association

Jefferson Center for Mental Health

Lehman Disability Planning

Mental Health Colorado

Mind Springs Health

Mountain Family Health Centers

One Colorado

Polsinelli PC

Pro 15

Progress Now Colorado

Project Angel Heart

Rocky Mountain Youth Clinics

Servicios de La Raza

Stahlman Disability Consulting

Sunrise Community Health

The Arc Arapahoe & Douglas Counties

The Arc of Colorado

The Arc of Larimer County

The Arc of Southwest Colorado

The Bell Policy Center

The Colorado Trust

The Community Reach Center

The Farley Health Policy Center

Together Colorado

TriCounty Health Department

UCHealth

Uncompahgre Medical Center

West Springs Hospital

Western Health Care Alliance

### Process Principles

- 1. Repeal the Affordable Care Act and related federal health policies only with a clearly identified and carefully considered replacement plan.** Health care is essential to people's quality of life, a significant economic driver in Colorado and nationally and a major piece of all state and local government responsibility and budgets. Consumers, businesses and governments all need the stability of understanding the federal framework in which they will operate going forward.
- 2. Given the interconnected nature of health care, across public programs and private markets, addressing component policy pieces in isolation could have significant, negative unintended consequences.** Health care is a complex system that requires comprehensive policy solutions. Making piecemeal changes to select parts of the system can have repercussions throughout the different portions of the health care system and our economy.
- 3. Find a bipartisan path to a new federal health care framework.** The partisanship surrounding the enactment of the Affordable Care Act created a major barrier to engage in meaningful policy debate about health care. As a country, we now have the opportunity to change that dynamic.

### Policy Principles

- 1. Expand choice, affordability and competition in private markets, while maintaining consumer protections.** Colorado and the country have seen historic gains in ensuring meaningful health coverage. Protecting those gains in coverage, as well as the corresponding benefits of improved access for consumers and sustainability for health care providers, is a priority.
- 2. Promote stability in the market in order to help control costs.** Continuous coverage for everyone is key to an effective and stable insurance market. Encouraging people to get and stay covered will balance risk pools with healthier people and help to control costs. Because instability creates more costs, ensure any transition provides adequate time for carriers to implement changes and minimize impact to consumers.

- 3. Recognize that promoting access to care at the right time in the right setting by ensuring access to coverage has benefits for people, the health care system and our economy.** It costs more to take care of the uninsured in the long term, since delay in seeking health care usually results in costing more than if the person accessed the system early. People without coverage are also unlikely to receive follow up care as well as medications they need to stay healthy. Ensuring access to preventive care and integrated treatment services helps to keep people healthy and leads to early detection and treatment, which can improve the quality of health outcomes and save costs.
- 4. Don't adopt strategies that shift cost from the federal government to state budgets without sufficient and sustained federal funding or create an uneven playing field in the health care market.** Health care markets and state budgets need certainty to function well and efficiently. Adhering to frameworks that require states to take on greater financial risk or larger portions of cost – without corresponding federal investment – will ultimately hurt states like Colorado, which have unique constitutional budget constraints.
- 5. Protect the most vulnerable populations.** Acknowledge the vital role that publically-funded programs play for many including children, seniors and people with disabilities who rely on long term care and services largely not provided by the private market. Ensure a strong health care market through stable funding and federal oversight of comprehensive, affordable coverage. Recognize that publically-funded programs are particularly important in rural communities where the payer mix is less robust and health care consumers and providers are more reliant on federal programs.
- 6. Empower rural communities.** Efficient delivery of health care is driven at the local level. One-size-fits-all approaches will exacerbate inefficiencies and inequities, further disadvantaging geographies that already struggle to find affordable, quality care.
- 7. Encourage health care transformation at the state and community levels with continued federal investment to lower the cost and improve quality of health care.** Colorado has capitalized on opportunities to bring efficiencies and improvements to our health care system through collaboration in both private and public delivery systems particularly by focusing on the integration of behavioral and physical health care. This work can be either fostered or impeded through Congressional efforts. It is critical to promote such innovation, leveraging the resourcefulness of market competition.