

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2310

July 31, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

We write to urge you to include provisions in the House-passed *Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act* that waive cost-sharing for treatments and future vaccines against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the next coronavirus economic stimulus bill.

We are more than four months into the economic and public health crisis created by the coronavirus pandemic and more than three months beyond the passage of the *Coronavirus Access, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*. While the *CARES Act* provided urgent and much needed emergency support for families and health care systems, Americans are still struggling with the financial insecurity wrought by the pandemic. More than 5.4 million Americans lost their health insurance between February and May, representing the highest annual percentage increase in the number of uninsured individuals in American history.¹ This has been driven by pandemic-related job losses. Unfortunately, the rate of new unemployment claims coupled with re-imposed lockdowns due to spikes in COVID-19 cases indicate that we are still far from economic recovery.²

On top of financial insecurity, newly uninsured and unemployed Americans also face uncertainty regarding the cost of their COVID-19 treatment. The cost of COVID-19 care depends on each individual case, but severe cases can lead to expensive care. This care is even more expensive for uninsured individuals, who are responsible for the high list price of COVID-19 treatment in the

¹ <https://www.familiesusa.org/resources/the-covid-19-pandemic-and-resulting-economic-crash-have-caused-the-greatest-health-insurance-losses-in-american-history/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/business/economy/unemployment-claims-coronavirus.html>

thousands of dollars. In addition, as manufacturers develop COVID-19 therapeutics and treatments, there's no guarantee that they will be available at an affordable price.

Providers might be reimbursed for caring for uninsured individuals through the Provider Relief Fund enacted as part of the *CARES Act*, but providers are not required to participate in the program. Further, funding for the Provider Relief Fund is limited, leaving no guarantee that uninsured individuals can receive the care they need without an expensive medical bill. To avoid that financial risk, uninsured individuals may forgo treatment for COVID-altogether.³

Congress must act to protect Americans regardless of insurance status from further financial uncertainty due to the high cost of COVID-19 treatment. We urge that House and Senate leadership include the following provisions included in the House-passed *HEROES Act* to protect Americans from COVID-19 expenses:

- Sec. 30104. Coverage at No Cost Sharing of COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment under Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- Sec. 30105. Optional Coverage at No Cost Sharing of COVID-19 Treatment and Vaccines for Uninsured Individuals.
- Sec. 30201. Holding Medicare Beneficiaries Harmless for Specified COVID-19 Treatment Services Furnished Under Part A or Part B of the Medicare Program.
- Sec. 30204. Coverage of Treatments for COVID-19 at No Cost Sharing Under the Medicare Advantage Program.
- Sec. 30205. Requiring Coverage Under Medicare Prescription Drug Plans and Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug Plans, Without the Imposition of Cost Sharing or Utilization Management Requirements, of Drugs Intended to Treat COVID-19 During Certain Emergencies.
- Sec. 30303. Coverage of COVID-19 Related Treatment at No Cost Sharing Under Private Health Insurance.
- Sec. 30631. Reimbursement for Additional Health Services Relating to Coronavirus for Uninsured Individuals.
- Sec. 30401. Prohibition on Copayments and Cost Sharing for TRICARE Beneficiaries Receiving COVID-19 Treatment.
- Sec. 30402. Prohibition on Copayments and Cost Sharing for Veterans Receiving COVID-19 Treatment Furnished by Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 30403. Prohibition on Copayments and Cost Sharing for Federal Civilian Employees Receiving COVID-19 Treatment.

In addition, we urge you to include provisions in the *HEROES Act* that would provide access to comprehensive, affordable health care coverage, including COBRA premium assistance, enhanced federal matching assistance percentage (FMAP) for Medicaid, and immediately opening up the federal health insurance exchange for new enrollment. We further urge you to build off these critical provisions by including funding for consumer enrollment assistance and enhanced premium tax credits.

³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/five-things-to-know-about-the-cost-of-covid-19-testing-and-treatment/>

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a devastating toll on the American people, and it will only continue to do so until we develop and distribute a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. We must work together to take swift action to protect the health and financial wellbeing of the nation in the next coronavirus legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tina Smith

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator