

March 22, 2020

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
S-230 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
S-221 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
H-232 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
H-204 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leaders:

As Congress considers legislation to address the dramatic impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic, the undersigned employers, health advocacy groups, and organizations representing workers urge you to include in the forthcoming stimulus package a federal program to subsidize COBRA continuation of coverage for workers who lose health care coverage due to loss of a job or a reduction in hours.

As you are aware, federal premium assistance subsidies were provided in the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and Congress extended the program into 2010. For workers eligible for continued health coverage under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), and similar federal and state laws, subsidies were provided to help cover the cost of coverage.

These subsidies provided stability for working families who were able to preserve their existing health coverage and continuity of care with the network of doctors, hospitals, and other providers in their health plan. As the nation's top health officials continuously encourage people to seek medical care when they suspect they have been exposed to the novel coronavirus, it is imperative to maintain continuity of care.

Additionally, disruptions in continuity of care have the unintended consequence of forcing beneficiaries to start over with new deductibles that must be met, even though they have already paid towards or met their deductibles for their current plan year, further aggravating financial instability.

Importantly, this policy will stabilize multiemployer plans that provide coverage to workers who earn health benefits while working for multiple employers in a year. These plans serve workers in sectors that will be severely impacted by the epidemic—construction; entertainment, hospitality; food processing, packing, and retail service.

We estimate this approach will also provide significant premium help for displaced workers' healthcare costs all while supporting continuity of care that avoids the disruption of seeking new coverage, allowing the newly unemployed to focus on obtaining a new job rather than navigating enrollment in new plan on a public exchange and locating new doctors. If layoffs are temporary, then there's better continuity when the worker is re-hired. The approach likewise provides displaced workers with another choice in addition to exchange coverage.

The undersigned groups support premium assistance for continuation of private coverage as a way help those who lose their jobs or who are furloughed. We urge Congress to include these measures in the fiscal stimulus bill. Thank you for considering this approach.

Sincerely,

America's Business Benefit Association
The American Benefits Council
AFL-CIO
Associated General Contractors
The Association of Union Contractors (TAUC)
The Broadway League
Communicating for America
Council for Affordable Health Coverage (CAHC)

Dead River Company
Geiger
Healthcare.com
Healthcare Leadership Council
Health Equity
International Union of Operating Engineers
Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)
L.L. Bean
Luke's Lobster
Mechanical Contractors Association of America
National Coordinating Committee for Multiemployer Plans (NCCMP)
National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA)
North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU)
Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA)
Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council
UNITE HERE
VIA Agency
WEX, Inc. Importing medications will worsen the opioid crisis and endanger law enforcement