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September 2, 2021

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

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader Hoyer:

At Community Catalyst, we strongly believe that promoting health equity is core to advancing racial justice and that centering the health of people in any “build back better” package is essential. We applaud the steps Congress has already taken to direct our nation’s significant resources towards building an equitable future for all of us.

Investing in affordable and accessible health care supports both the short and long-term recovery of individuals, families, and the economy. To support that end, Community Catalyst has engaged hundreds of local and state-based organizations to develop a federal policy agenda that reflects the needs and expectations of communities across the country, both in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the deep inequities it has exposed.

We call on Congress to immediately make health care *affordable* by passing policies that:

- Develop a direct coverage option that guarantees affordable health care for the 2.2 million people in the Medicaid coverage gap.
- Make the ACA premium assistance enhancements established by the American Rescue Plan Act permanent.
- Address cost-sharing by making the ACA benchmark plan a “gold” level plan, increasing the value of Marketplace plans, and eliminating the firewall so that consumers with unaffordable employer-based plans can access Marketplace plans.
- Lower drug prices for people at the point of service.

Community Catalyst also calls on Congress to immediately improve *access* to health care by passing policies that:

- Permanently extend Medicaid for one year postpartum with an enhanced federal matching rate to provide birthing people access to the essential services they need to support their own health and the health of their pregnancy.
- Lift the 5-year bar so that immigrants can access federal benefits for which they are eligible.
- Invest in home and community-based services to improve access to services for individuals with disabilities and support essential health care workers.



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- Allow for health care coverage and transition services for individuals re-entering communities after incarceration.
- Mandate dental benefits for Medicaid to ensure oral health care is available.

We are happy to provide more detail about each of these policy solutions as needed. But one thing is clear: if enacted, these policies will help people who continue to experience longstanding and unfair barriers to health and economic security – including Black and brown communities, women, people with low-incomes, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and immigrants.

Along with our partners, we acknowledge and appreciate the progress already made by the Biden administration and Congress. This includes American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA's) expansion of financial assistance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and enhanced federal funding to encourage Medicaid expansion in the 12 states that continue to deny millions of people affordable health coverage. The strong ACA enrollment numbers during the special enrollment period, and the percolating interest of elected officials in Medicaid holdout states demonstrate the impact of those policies in meeting the demand for access to affordable health coverage. At the same time, there is no question that much more needs to be done and that **now is the time to act** to ensure that millions of people have the security of affordable health coverage and care. Specifically, it is an urgent issue of health and racial justice that Congress take action to close the Medicaid coverage gap.

We look forward to supporting the administration and Congress in passing these critical health care policies the meets the moment for people – and beyond that, we are committed to working with you to advance health equity policies focused on creating a system where all people have the ability to be healthy and well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Stewart", written in a cursive style.

Emily Stewart

Executive Director, Community Catalyst