

Statement for the Record
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Markup of Budget Reconciliation Legislative Recommendations
February 11, 2021

The American Lung Association writes to express our strong support for several provisions included within the Committee's recommendations for budget reconciliation legislation. The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health association in the United States, representing the millions of Americans living with lung diseases, including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, and pulmonary fibrosis. The Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy.

Our nation continues to grapple with a respiratory pandemic that has taken the lives of nearly a half a million individuals in the United States. Consequently, the Lung Association urges the Committee to quickly advance the many provisions put forth that will help individuals gain access to quality and affordable care, support critical public health activities and invest in solutions to the disparate impacts of air pollution.

Medicaid

The Medicaid program serves a critical role for patients with and at risk of lung disease, and we are pleased to see the Committee include policies that would incentivize Medicaid expansion, improve COVID-19 vaccine coverage in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and allow states to extend coverage for postpartum women for up to 12 months.

The expansion of Medicaid coverage to all individuals with incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level would extend quality and affordable coverage to at least 4.3 million uninsured adults living in states that have not yet expanded, including those who are in the coverage gap and have not been eligible for Medicaid or Marketplace coverage, a group of people that has likely grown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Medicaid expansion ensures greater access to coverage and, in doing so, saves lives. Medicaid expansion also plays an important role in addressing health disparities; for example, one recent study found that states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) reduced racial disparities in timely treatment for cancer patients.

The Lung Association applauds the Committee for taking these important steps to bolster and expand this critical program at a time when our nation needs it most.

Public Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a robust public health infrastructure. In order to end the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent additional suffering, it is vital that we invest in our public health system and ensure that all persons in the United States have access to COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines at no-cost, regardless of their healthcare coverage. To this end, as stated above, the Lung Association is pleased to see provisions included in the Committee's recommendation that would extend the period of COVID-19 vaccine coverage in Medicaid, including for those without healthcare coverage.

We are also pleased to see provisions that would provide significant and necessary funds for crucial public health activities during this crisis, including for vaccine activities at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), efforts to increase vaccine confidence, data modernization, global infectious disease activities, testing and contact tracing programs, the bolstering of our vaccine supply chain and the expansion and sustainment of our public health workforce. These provisions will go a long way toward strengthening the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we encourage the Committee to advance them.

Healthy Air

Nearly half of the country lives in counties receiving failing grades for air pollution, putting the health of millions in the United States at risk – including the millions living with a lung disease, babies and children, pregnant women and seniors. Growing scientific evidence also shows links between prolonged exposure to air pollution and increased risk of complications from COVID-19. But the burden of air pollution is not evenly shared. Lower income individuals and people of color face higher exposure to pollutants and, therefore, may experience a greater, more negative, health response to such pollution. The Lung Association is pleased to see the Committee prioritizing environmental health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic with the provisions for environmental justice grants, Section 103 funds under the Clean Air Act and funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

The American Lung Association appreciates the Committee's work to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on its legislative recommendations for the budget reconciliation pursuant to S.Con.Res.5. We ask that the Committee move to adopt the provisions discussed above and advance them to the House floor.