



Pacific Island Health Officers' Association

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March 16, 2021

PIHOA COMMUNIQUE 2021-02

Letter of Support for Bill H.R.265 - Insular Area Medicaid Parity Act for the US Pacific Island Territories of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam

Dear Congressional Leaders,

We, the Chief Health Officials of the six US-affiliated Pacific Island (USAPI) Territories of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam, and the US Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau, wish to convey our collective support for **Bill H.R.265** to achieve Medicaid parity for the US Pacific Island Territories of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, including our territorial brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

This bill is long-overdue in addressing a legacy of structural (legislative) inequities that have severely restricted the ability of our limited-resource healthcare systems to provide an adequate level of comprehensive and quality care appropriate to the needs of our American Pacific Islander communities. Today's disproportionately high rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases exhibited across all of our island territories is an unfortunate testament to this legacy, and where a significant amount of healthcare expenditures is spent on tertiary care and off-island medical referrals to hospitals in the Philippines, Taiwan and New Zealand. It is a sad legacy, indeed, to see our US citizen, American residents needing to travel to foreign countries to seek more advanced medical care. Americans in the US Pacific Territories are no less American than those living in the continental US states, and as such, must be accorded the same rights to health as all other US citizens.

More specifically:

1. All US Territories will face the same Medicaid "cliff" for which a band-aid solution was made in 2019. A long-term solution is needed. Simply put, eliminate the cap and increase the FMAP.
2. For our disaster-prone island territories, Medicaid financing must be responsive, becoming easier for Americans to access when they are most vulnerable without needing to wait for additional appropriations from Congress.
3. Medicaid is built as a counter-cyclical program: its federal support expands to meet rising needs during an economic downturn. However, for the territories, Medicaid program funding is stagnant regardless of

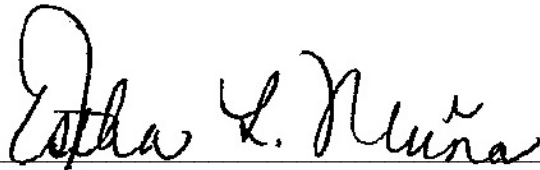
economic conditions, and despite the fact that in the past five years alone, American Samoa, CNMI and Guam collectively experienced three Category 5 typhoons, multiple and current Dengue, Zika and Measles outbreaks, and a global pandemic (Super Typhoon Yutu that hit the CNMI in 2018 was the second strongest recorded typhoon/cyclone ever to hit US soil).

4. The 1108 cap on federal contribution and low federal matching rate for territory Medicaid programs are arbitrary – the funding disparity is not supported by fair or substantial cause.

Medicaid reimbursement is a critical source of revenue for US Pacific Territorial healthcare service providers. Case in point, one out of three CNMI residents were enrolled in Medicaid before the pandemic, and now during the pandemic, roughly three out of four are enrolled. Consequently, the health of our American communities is directly dependent upon adequate, equitable and reliable Medicaid financing.

We urgently request Congressional leadership to support in full and without prejudice, **Bill H.R.265 - Insular Area Medicaid Parity Act**, to remove these structural barriers to assure a fair and adequate level of federal investment in our healthcare systems. In turn, this will enable us to build on current successes for more sustainable and resilient healthcare systems focused on cost-effective and impactful primary care and prevention services.

With Respect:



Dr. Esther Muña, PhD, FACHE, Executive Board President
Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation
United States Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



Ms. Emi Chutaro, MSc, Executive Director
Pacific Island Health Officers' Association (PIHOA)

Cc:

1. His Excellency President Surangel Whipps, Jr., Executive Board Vice-President, Acting on behalf of the Honorable Minister of Health, Palau Ministry of Health, Republic of Palau
2. The Honorable Bruce Bilimon, Executive Board Treasurer, Minister of Health and Human Services, Marshall Islands Ministry of Health, Republic of the Marshall Islands
3. The Honorable Marcus Samo, Executive Board Secretary, Acting on behalf of the Secretary of Health, National Department of Health and Social Affairs, Federated States of Micronesia
4. The Honorable Motusa Tuileama Nua, Executive Board Member, Director of Health, American Samoa Department of Health, United States Territory of American Samoa
5. The Honorable Arthur San Agustin, Executive Board Member, Director of Public Health and Social Services, Guam Department of Health and Social Services, United States Territory of Guam