



ADVOCACY & BENEFITS COUNSELING FOR HEALTH, INC.
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Dear President Obama and Members of the Delegation:

Over the past few months, the effort to reform America's health care system has spurred extensive debate and among all parties, from lawmakers to business owners to consumers. Yet, a key issue has received scant attention: the crucial role of advocacy and outreach to help people get the services they need and deserve.

Whatever shape health reform takes, Americans will face a new system of new choices, rules, and regulations. People will continue to need help navigating layers and levels of care, advocating for their rights, and challenging errors, denials, or other barriers.

As a non-profit, public interest law firm, ABC for Health has fifteen years of experience helping consumers find and maintain affordable health coverage. Our advocates fill a critical need for advocacy services, from initial outreach to Medicaid-eligible individuals who may not even be aware of the program, to in-depth assistance in challenging wrongful terminations and payment denials. When Wisconsin unveiled its new coverage plan for adults without dependent children this June, ABC for health staff contact over 600 targeted individuals for eligibility screening and application assistance, many of whom had no idea the program existed.

ABC's efforts are extremely cost-effective. Each dollar spent on ABC's advocacy and outreach efforts generates nearly \$28 in health care payments in return, plus savings in charity care, bad debt, and the ripple effects of bankruptcy, home foreclosure, and long-term debt. ABC's work demonstrates the importance of a national system of advocacy and outreach, and we urge you to consider our enclosed proposed amendment to reform legislation, to include the following components:

- Health Benefits Counselors—to help consumers find, evaluate, apply for and maintain affordable and appropriate health coverage.
- Health Care Navigators—to aid consumers in finding appropriate care, managing complex health conditions, and overcoming barriers to effective treatment, such as language, poverty, mental status, or otherwise.
- Legal Advocacy Support—Legal expertise in regulations and due process law is essential to helping consumers challenge denials or other grievances in a guided and cost-effective way.

These measures are essential to enacting a fair *and effective* health reform package. Lawmakers cannot afford to adopt a "If we build it, they will come," mentality. Successful reform must both offer better coverage and care to all Americans and reach those Americans who need it most.

