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PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
February 8, 2021

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Alliance Supports Bennet, Colleagues Bicameral Legislation to Expand Medicaid Coverage for COVID-19 Treatment, Vaccines

February 8, 2021. Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Mazie K. Hirono (D-Hawaii), Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.), and U.S. Representative Tony Cárdenas (D-Calif.) introduced legislation to increase coverage for uninsured Americans receiving Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)-related treatment, preventive services, and vaccines through Medicaid. The Stronger Medicaid Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Act increases support for expanding health care needs resulting from the current public health crisis. The legislation would allow Medicaid programs to pay for treatment and prevention, hospitalization, drugs, vaccines, and other related services for individuals with COVID-19 who are uninsured. This builds on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act which provided Medicaid coverage for COVID-19 testing for uninsured individuals. Cárdenas introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives today.

“For millions of Americans over the last year, the devastating news of a job loss has also meant facing the reality of losing their health insurance. We cannot let individuals and families lose access to care during the worst public health crisis in a century because of the loss of a job, or other circumstances that are out of their control,” said Bennet. “Our legislation would ensure anyone who has experienced job loss and lost their health coverage during the pandemic is able to receive COVID-19 treatment and get vaccinated through Medicaid.”

“Far too many people in Hawaii and across the country have faced the effects of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, that has meant losing their job and the health coverage that comes with it,” said Hirono. “This legislation will make sure that everyone in our country can access COVID-19 testing and treatment, regardless of their immigration, employment, or insurance status. Our communities are stronger when we are all healthy.”

“As we battle this devastating public health crisis, no one should be denied lifesaving care because they can’t afford it. Health care affordability was a serious issue in our country before the pandemic hit, but now millions of families are struggling to afford the COVID

treatments they need – especially uninsured Americans," said Shaheen. "That's why we have reintroduced this bill to expand coverage for COVID-19 treatments for uninsured Americans through Medicaid, with federal funding to reimburse states for extra costs. Making health care as accessible as possible must be our top priority, especially amid this deadly pandemic."

"Every American deserves a vaccine or treatment against COVID-19, regardless of cost," said Blumenthal. "As more Americans are unemployed, and therefore uninsured, we must assure that no one is left behind. It's vital to all of our health."

"If we truly want to help Americans during the pandemic then we need an equitable response where COVID-19 related treatment is available to everyone, including uninsured individuals," said Smith. "A historic number of people have lost their jobs during the pandemic, and with that their health insurance. This legislation will help them get COVID-19 treatment without worrying if they can afford it. I am excited to keep working with my colleagues and the Biden Administration to help us recover from this pandemic and get our economy back on track."

"Providing access to healthcare during this national health emergency is not only the morally right thing to do, but it is also good policy," said Cárdenas. "The more we do to ensure people have access to testing and medical care, the greater our chances are of containing the virus and getting America back to work. Our number one priority should be to keep American families safe. If we truly want to 'build back better', we must contain the virus, and that starts by ensuring anyone who needs medical care gets it."

"Rates of COVID-19 cases are 1.7 times higher, hospitalization 4.1 times higher, and deaths 2.8 times higher for Hispanics and Latinos compared to non-Hispanic Whites. The Stronger Medicaid Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Act is a crucial piece of our national response; particularly for the one in five Hispanics that are uninsured, many who are essential workers but still working uninsured or workers who have lost their job during the pandemic. Access to COVID-19 prevention and treatment for all is critical to our national response and recovery from this public health crisis," said Jane Delgado, President and CEO of National Alliance for Hispanic Health.

"We know that up to 70% of all people with an intellectual and/or developmental disabilities are unknown to the State and as such, are not currently receiving services through Medicaid. Many of these individuals are uninsured. They are also at increased risk of contracting and becoming seriously ill from exposure to COVID-19. This bill would

help to mitigate the risk of severe illness and help to curb the pandemic through its careful understanding of a nuanced population who simultaneously face both extreme risk and are significantly disadvantaged. We strongly support this bill and appreciate such thoughtful and impactful policy," said Christiano Sosa, Executive Director of The Arc of Colorado.

"Jewish Family Service of Colorado firmly supports The Stronger Medicaid Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Act as introduced by Senators Bennet, Hirono, Shaheen, Blumenthal, and Smith. If enacted, this legislation would have an immediate and significant impact on the vulnerable Coloradans we serve who have lost medical insurance because of COVID-related job and economic losses. Medicaid is a crucial safety-net program that should be available to any uninsured individual, regardless of immigration status, and particularly during this unprecedented pandemic. We urge the 117th Congress to pass this bill to provide life-saving treatments and vaccines to anyone through emergency Medicaid," said Linda P. Foster, President & CEO of Jewish Family Service of Colorado.

Over 77 million individuals are enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), providing essential coverage for health care services, like primary and preventive care, mental and behavioral health care, and chronic illness treatment. Millions of Americans who rely on their employer-sponsored insurance have lost their jobs since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, often losing their health coverage. Medicaid provides a critical safety net for these individuals and others who have lost coverage or cannot afford care. As individuals lost both their health coverage and income, Medicaid enrollment increased by 11.3% between March and September of 2020.

The Stronger Medicaid Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Act is supported by The Arc of Colorado, Jewish Family Service of Colorado, Colorado Safety Net Collaborative, National Alliance for Hispanic Health, Families USA, The Arc of the United States, Epilepsy Foundation, National Hispanic Medical Association, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, National Immigration Law Center, National Health Law Program, and People's Health Clinic.

Bennet first introduced the Stronger Medicaid Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Act in July 2020.