

***Statement by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius Before United States Senate Committee on Finance on FY 2015 Budget***

*[Remarks as Delivered]*

**Thursday, April 10, 2014**

Thank you so much Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Hatch, Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to join you here today.

I want to start by thanking members of the committee for your commitment to improving Medicare Advantage. And today, over half of all enrollees receive benefits from a 4 or 5 star rated Medicare Advantage plan thanks to our collaborative work together.

Our Department's mission is to help our fellow Americans secure the opportunity to live happier, healthier lives – and reach their fullest potential. Although the hard work of our employees is oftentimes unheralded, their efforts benefit millions of Americans.

Our nation's seniors – for example – benefit from the hard work of employees at CMS and the Administration on Community Living. Children benefit from the ACF-administered initiatives like Head Start. And all of us benefit from SAMHSA's work on mental health and substance use treatment – and from the efforts of employees across all our Department's operating and staff divisions.

Another area that is benefitting all Americans is the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Even prior to Open Enrollment in the Marketplace, millions of Americans and their families obtained new rights and new consumer protections.

During these past six months, millions have obtained the security and peace-of-mind of affordable health coverage. Many of the people I've met have told me that they've been able to get covered for the first time in years. And some have insurance for the first time in their entire lives.

Last week, we announced that 7.1 million Americans have signed up for private insurance through the Marketplace.

As of this week, 400,000 additional Americans have signed up – and we expect that number to continue to grow.

Between October and the end of February, an additional 3 million Americans enrolled in Medicaid coverage, and a total of 11.7 million people were determined eligible for Medicaid and CHIP.

Now we know that if more states move forward on Medicaid expansion, more uninsured Americans will be able to get covered.

**OPPORTUNITY, GROWTH, SECURITY**

Affordable health coverage, accessible health care, mental health and substance use treatment, food safety, early childhood, health security – all of these issues connect to President Obama's goals for expanding opportunity, strengthening our security, and growing our economy.

The budget before you would move these priorities forward.

These investments create jobs and strengthen our primary care workforce by expanding the National Health Service Corps.

We add to our mental health workforce by increasing the number of licensed behavioral health professionals, peer professionals, and mental health and addiction specialists.

We protect the security of our seniors by investing in Elder Justice.

And we invest in prevention efforts to protect the health of patients in nursing homes, primary care practices, and other health care settings.

The proposed expenditures also advance new approaches to some of our nation's most vulnerable children: those in foster care. We're proposing investing in a new \$750 million CMS-ACF partnership to encourage the use of evidence-based screening, assessment, and treatment of trauma and mental health disorders – all with the goal of reducing the over prescription of psychotropic medications.

And I want to particularly thank Senator Grassley and other members of this Committee for expressing interest in the Administration's focus on this area, and I look forward to working with the Committee to address this need.

The budget also strengthens and expands important Birth-to-Kindergarten initiatives with strategic investments in priorities like the Child Care & Development Fund, home visitation and Early Head Start partnerships.

President Obama's total child care request will enable a total of 1.4 million children to receive assistance.

And if you move forward with the Presidents' Opportunity Growth & Security Initiative, we'll be able to provide an additional 100,000 children with access to high-quality early education – through the expansion of Early Head Start partnerships.

Now we know that these investments work: They pay dividends throughout a child's education and development, and they're proven to return an estimated \$7 for every dollar we invest. And I would say Mr. Chairman; there are a lot of traders on Wall Street who would be envious of that kind of return.

In addition to a profound and lasting impact on children, these investments would also save lives. Because much of the early learning funding for partnership with states is paid for by increasing the tobacco tax, which we know is one of the most effective ways to prevent smoking, especially among young smokers.

Today we still have 3,200 American children trying their first cigarette each and every day. And each day, 2,100 of our children and young adults become daily smokers.

Now it's no surprise that these early childhood investments have broad bipartisan support from governors, CEOs, leaders in military and law enforcement, parents, and health care providers, and our global competitors are financing similar opportunities for their children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Finally, this budget not only invests, but also saves: We will contribute a net \$369 billion toward deficit reduction over the next decade.

When you take all of these factors into account, it is clear that the budget before you is a security budget; an economic growth budget; and an opportunity budget, which puts us on a pathway to a healthier and more prosperous nation.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for having me here today and I look forward to your questions.