



National Association of School Nurses

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, United States House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader, United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Preserving Current Vision Insurance Coverage

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Reid:

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) is the leader in advocacy for student health and professional development of school nurses. We support children's health and educational success by developing and providing leadership to advance school nursing practices.

NASN strongly supports the goal of increasing children's access to eye care services, as we are often the first line of defense in helping to identify potential vision problems. However, we are concerned that, unless amended, the pending health care reform legislation could disrupt and disconnect children's vision coverage from that of their parents and prevent their access to specialized or "stand-alone" vision plans.

Disrupting the ability of children to have specialized vision insurance along with their parents would be very counterproductive. **People who have specialized, comprehensive vision coverage are more than twice as likely to use it as compared to those who have vision coverage that is only one of many major medical benefits**, and this is a critical aspect of helping in the early diagnosis and even prevention of eye disease and other related chronic diseases – including diabetes. According to HHS' *Healthy People 2010 Midcourse Review*, progress is being made in reducing blindness in children and adolescents under 18 years of age, with 50 percent of the targeted change achieved as of the midcourse review.

Unfortunately, the House bill (H.R. 3962) does not contain adequate protections to preserve stand-alone vision insurance coverage. Section 202(c)(2)(B)(ii) of H.R. 3962 contains language regarding stand-alone vision coverage, but it prohibits stand-alone plans within the Exchange and needs to be strengthened regarding coverage outside of the Exchange. The Senate-passed bill (H.R. 3590) contains

protections* only for stand-alone dental coverage. **We ask that the House-passed references to stand-alone vision and dental coverage be retained, as the House and Senate confer on the bills. We also request that the final bill include the language of Senator Landrieu's Amendment # 3228 (co-sponsored by Senators Warner, Akaka, Gillibrand, Specter, and Inouye).** That language would enable children to continue to be covered, along with their parents, under stand-alone vision coverage. It is not in anyone's best interests to have children's coverage split unnecessarily from their parents' coverage or to prevent children from realizing the benefits of stand-alone vision coverage.

As you know, these specialized or stand-alone vision plans are currently available to federal employees as part of FEDVIP. In fact, one of those plans, not-for-profit VSP Vision Care (which covers 55 million people), was recognized by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as having the broadest access for beneficiaries of any health plan, major medical or specialized/stand-alone. This was particularly the case in rural areas. It is instructive for the debate in Congress that OPM had the ability to choose whether vision and dental coverage should be offered through major medical but chose to have it delivered by stand-alone plans for federal employees. The rest of Americans deserve no less of a choice.

NASN would like to thank you for your leadership in health care reform, as well as for your efforts to ensure that vision care coverage for American families will not be disrupted or disconnected. School nurses know the importance of vision health for their students.

Sincerely,



Amy Garcia, RN, MSN, CAE
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
The Honorable Charles B. Rangel
The Honorable George Miller
The Honorable Charles Melancon
The Honorable Doris Matsui

The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
The Honorable Tom Harkin
The Honorable Mary Landrieu
The Honorable Mark Warner

* Protections for stand-alone dental insurance were adopted on 9/24/09 as Senate Finance Committee Amendment "Stabenow. C-7".