



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Enzi Health Insurance Legislation Would Jeopardize Lifesaving Coverage Protections for Millions with Diabetes

Bill, S.1955, would allow health insurers to circumvent existing laws in 46 states that guarantee coverage for diabetes medications, supplies and training

Alexandria, VA (March 7, 2006) – The American Diabetes Association (ADA) today expressed its strong opposition to proposed federal legislation that would enable health insurers to bypass existing state health insurance regulations. In doing so, the “Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act” (S. 1955) would result in the loss of critical health coverage guarantees for millions of people with diabetes. Forty-six states and the District of Columbia require insurers to provide coverage for diabetes supplies, medication, equipment and education, but S. 1955 would undermine those basic protections. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, chaired by bill sponsor Senator Michael Enzi, will mark up the bill Wednesday morning. At the markup, Senator Jeff Bingaman will offer an amendment to protect the diabetes coverage benefit in the states where it is maintained in state law.

“These protections were enacted over the past decade with the bipartisan support of legislatures, governors, and state insurance commissioners,” L. Hunter Limbaugh, the ADA’s Chair for Advocacy, today wrote Sen. Enzi. “It has been the Association’s experience that without these protections, state-regulated insurers often do not provide adequate diabetes coverage. Indeed, in the four current states without mandated diabetes coverage, insurers often do not provide these life-saving diabetes provisions.”

The American Diabetes Association is committed to ensuring that the 20.8 million Americans with diabetes have access to the health coverage they need to manage the disease and prevent its serious and costly complications, including heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, blindness and amputations. A critically important component of this effort has been the consumer protections in 46 states requiring insurers to provide adequate coverage for diabetes supplies, equipment and education. Those protections have been vital to millions of people with diabetes. In attempting to provide much-needed relief to small business owners, S.1955 would make changes that would impact all state-regulated plans, and would result in millions of Americans with diabetes losing their guarantee of diabetes coverage.

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“Passage of this legislation would not come at a worse time,” Limbaugh said. “At a time when the diabetes epidemic is worsening and the associated costs of complications are rising, it is unwise to allow insurers to reduce or eliminate coverage for diabetes tools. An increase in diabetes prevalence coupled with poor diabetes management, ultimately will increase the burden on the nation’s already strapped healthcare system.”

The ADA is encouraging the HELP Committee to support Senator Bingaman’s diabetes protection amendment, which would not create any additional mandated coverage, but would ensure that the legislation includes cost-effective diabetes coverage in states where such laws already exist. The cost of diabetes mandates on health insurance premiums has been studied by numerous states and has proven to have an insignificant effect on the overall cost of monthly health insurance premiums. Louisiana, for example, found that their diabetes requirement accounted for a mere .006% of monthly premiums. After conducting a comprehensive analysis of Utah’s diabetes mandate, state legislators chose to strengthen their state law, doing away with a sunset clause that would abolish the diabetes requirement if they found the cost too burdensome.

“At a time when diabetes has become an epidemic in this country, we should be doing more – not less – when it comes to diabetes health coverage,” Limbaugh added. “States have taken the initiative to provide vital diabetes coverage for people in their state. Unfortunately, this legislation would strike a blow to those efforts. While the American Diabetes Association shares the concern for helping small businesses provide health insurance to their employees, we strongly believe that this legislation is not the answer.”

Nearly 21 million Americans have diabetes, up from 18.2 million in 2003. One in three Americans, and one in two minorities, born in 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime. The cost of diabetes in the United States in 2002 was at least \$132 billion; one in ten healthcare dollars is spent on diabetes and its complications.

The American Diabetes Association is the nation’s leading voluntary health organization supporting diabetes research, information and advocacy. The Association’s advocacy efforts include helping to combat discrimination against people with diabetes; advocating for the increase of federal diabetes research and programs; and improved access to, and quality of, healthcare for people with diabetes. The Association’s mission is to prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of all people affected by diabetes. Founded in 1940, the Association provides service to hundreds of communities across the country. For more information please call the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) or visit www.diabetes.org. Information from both these sources is available in English and Spanish.