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January 13, 2010

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Health Care Advocates Urge Senators Nelson and Johanns to Make Affordability A Priority in Final Health Reform Legislation

*Groups release letter available at <http://bit.ly/708xET>
and national sign on letter is available at: <http://bit.ly/8CFcKY>*

Lincoln, NE - With health reform legislation now in its final stages, leaders from several Nebraska organizations released a letter signed by 21 organizations and faith leaders urging Senators Nelson and Johanns to make affordability for low- and moderate-income Nebraskans a priority in the merging of the House and Senate health reform bills.

The letter explains that health reform's success depends upon making health care coverage affordable for Nebraska families. "This overarching goal – making health care affordable and accessible to all Americans – is thwarted if people are required to purchase coverage that costs too much and offers too little. "

"The health reform bills passed by the House and Senate will make critical improvements to our health care system which will benefit all Nebraskans, including the 224,000 Nebraskans – 45,000 of them children – who lack coverage today," said Jennifer Carter, Director of the Health Care Access Program at the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest. "But the groups signing this letter recognize that affordable coverage is the key to reform and so are urging our leaders to ensure that the final bill combines the strengths of both bills to ensure access to affordable coverage."

"Nebraskans want the chance to contribute their fair share and purchase affordable coverage," added Jane Fleming Kleeb, Director of Change that Works Nebraska. "Health reform will help them do that if the final bill ensures that coverage is financially within their reach."

The letter encourages Senators Nelson and Johanns to urge their colleagues to adopt the best affordability provisions from both the House and Senate bills. The House bill extends coverage to 36 million Americans – compared to 31 million in the Senate – and sets premium and out-of-pocket costs at more affordable levels for low- and moderate-income families making *under* 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (about \$45,775 for a family of three). The Senate bill, however, makes coverage more affordable for moderate-income families making *more* than 250% FPL.

In addition, Congress must ensure that older Americans can obtain affordable coverage by including strict limits on how much insurers can charge based on age.

“On the issue of age rating, we strongly support the House bill which would prevent insurers from charging older Americans more than twice as much as younger persons for the same policies,” said Connie Benjamin, State Director of AARP Nebraska.

The letter’s release coincides with a National Health Care Affordability Summit on Capitol Hill, where Members of Congress joined over 200 community leaders to rally in support of affordability for families. Several Nebraska organizations and faith leaders also signed a similar national letter that included more than 750 signatories urging the adoption of strong affordability provisions.

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