



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

July 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer,

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The co-chairs of the CCD Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) taskforce write in response to the HEALS Act that was introduced in the Senate yesterday. We are extremely disappointed that the legislation, as introduced, includes no additional funding whatsoever for the Medicaid program and the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) that people with disabilities rely on.

As we have written several times since the beginning of the pandemic, people with disabilities and older adults are particularly at risk as COVID-19 spreads across the country, facing high risk of complications and death if exposed to the virus and needing to isolate to protect themselves. We have sent several letters from National and State organizations highlighting the urgent needs of the disability community and service systems, and specifically highlighting the need for dedicated funding for HCBS.

We were dismayed to see that none of the components of the Heals Act provided any funding to support the Medicaid program, including desperately needed HCBS funding. This funding is crucial as State HCBS programs must continue to provide these life-sustaining daily in-home services even as they face staff shortages due to sickness, self-isolation, childcare needs, low wages, and the fact that HCBS service workers have struggled to get protective equipment even in the face of higher infection risk. These services are critical to keeping people with disabilities and older adults out of nursing homes and other institutions, where COVID-19 infections and deaths are significantly more likely.

Republican and Democratic governors and Medicaid Directors have strongly supported additional federal Medicaid assistance as states face unprecedented declines in revenues and historic budget shortfalls that undermine their ability to meet the growing needs of vulnerable populations. We urge you to support the 12 percentage point general Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) increase and to including maintenance of effort (MOE) protections such as those included in the Families First Act.

As states face budget crises, they are responding by making cuts to Medicaid, particularly for optional services like HCBS. Simultaneously, with a growing number of uninsured in the country, State Medicaid agencies expect, as happens in countercyclical downturns, an increase in enrollment. That is why, during a pandemic, federal Medicaid funding must increase to maintain the stability of the program. The general FMAP enhancement included in the HEROES Act is necessary but insufficient to ensure the viability of vitally important HCBS programs. Without the dedicated funding stream offered by the targeted FMAP enhancement also included in the HEROES Act, states may not be able to sustain vital HCBS that people with disabilities and aging adults rely on to stay safely in their homes and communities and lower the risks of infection that are inherent in institutionalization.

We urge lawmakers and leadership to continue their efforts to incorporate the above priorities as you negotiate the next COVID-19 legislation. The Senate must act to address the serious, destabilizing deficits facing our nation's only publicly funded long term care system by including both the broad enhanced FMAP and the targeted enhanced FMAP in its coronavirus response package. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Nicole Jorwic (jorwic@thearc.org).

Sincerely,

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