



National Business
Coalition on Health

February 14, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Dear Chairman Baucus,

In behalf of the sixty coalition members and over 10,000 employer members of the National Business Coalition on Health (NBCH), I want to thank you for the Finance Committee's strong and progressive efforts toward reforming Medicare physician services into program that is structured to reward high-quality, patient-centered care. Furthermore, we appreciate the Committee's genuine understanding of value-driven health care, which is evident in the Committee's January 23, 2008 letter to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Kerry Weems regarding the Medicare Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI).

NBCH and its member employer coalitions have a long history of value-based purchasing of health care. In fact, NBCH and many of our member coalitions have been very supportive of and engaged in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) "Value-Driven Health Care Initiative." In fact, we have been working have been working closely with HHS to develop tools and resources that help purchasers understand the importance of value-driven health care and the extremely valuable role that they can play in making sure health plans and providers are giving the consumers the best care in the most efficient manner possible. We firmly believe that health care reform through value-based purchasing is the most thoughtful, prospective way to control costs, expand accessibility and improve quality and care efficiency. NBCH also believes that government, business, provider and consumer partnership and shared responsibility in this effort.

In that regard, NBCH believes that the PQRI sets an extremely important precedent toward the proliferation-"mainstreaming"- of provider performance quality measures, particularly performance on clinical-based measures. We are very pleased with the Committees efforts to extend and strengthen PQRI, particularly through the incremental and important strategies put in place through the recent Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP Extension Act of 2007 (MMSEA). MMSEA imparts important next steps in the manner in which Congress and HHS will continue to support the transformation of Medicare into a prudent purchaser of higher quality, consumer-centered health care for its beneficiaries and to the entire nation.

In particular, NBCH is pleased that MMSEA requires Medicare to continue to expand and refine PQRI quality measures in 2009 with a more strategic focus on measures for specific chronic disease conditions and preventive care. We also agree that the PQRI program should employ NQF-endorsed performance measures when appropriate, and adopt more rigorous utilization of existing clinical data registries to report on clinical quality performance measures and to reward providers accordingly. This strategy will provide a more detailed and transparent perspective of provider performance, and hopefully encourage better provider participation due to improved incentives, more reasonable measures, and a wider pool of providers by which to be compared.

In closing, NBCH also is glad to see that PQRI goals tie directly to two of the four cornerstones of the HHS efforts to build a value-driven health care system, which are measuring and publishing quality information, and promoting the quality and efficiency of care. All of these activities employed by both the Administration and the Finance Committee are an essential foundation for a successful reporting, measurement and payment system, and eventually will go a long way in supporting private sector value-based purchasing efforts. Though we want make clear the importance of working together to continue to succeed.

NBCH looks forward to working with and supporting the Finance Committee efforts to truly reform Medicare physician services into a program that is aligned with quality and structured to reward high-quality, efficient, patient-centered care. Again, NBCH is very appreciative of the Committee's leadership and strong support of this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew Wilber".

President and Chief Executive Officer
National Business Coalition on Health

Identical letter sent to The Honorable Charles E. Grassley