



American Public Health Association

800 I Street, NW • Washington, DC 20001-3710

(202) 777-APHA • Fax: (202) 777-2534 • comments@apha.org • <http://www.apha.org>

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Contact: David Fouse, (202) 777-2501
david.fouse@apha.org

APHA Urges House of Representatives to Improve Medicare Prescription Drug Proposals

Washington, DC, June 17, 2003— The American Public Health Association (APHA) today called on members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee to make significant improvements to the Medicare prescription drug legislation slated for action this week. The proposals as written contain large coverage gaps and would require Medicare beneficiaries to use private insurance coverage in order to receive a prescription drug benefit.

“Forcing seniors to use private insurance coverage rather than allowing them to receive prescription drug benefits through the current Medicare system neither adequately protects their interests nor their health,” said Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, executive director of APHA.

“While we are very pleased Congress is working to improve Medicare, we must ensure they are passing a bill that provides our seniors with the comprehensive and affordable coverage they deserve – not a plan with excessive out-of-pocket costs and limited coverage options,” he said.

APHA firmly believes that any prescription drug program for seniors is best provided through the Medicare program where efficient management and appropriate cost-containment can be assured, not relegated to private insurers. Any Medicare prescription drug plan passed by Congress this year must include the following components:

- Guaranteed access for all Medicare eligible older adults and individuals with disabilities regardless of income or health status;
- Protection against premium and out-of-pocket costs for low-income beneficiaries;
- Catastrophic protection for all beneficiaries; and
- Defined quality of care standards and systems to help prevent medication errors.

The American Public Health Association, the oldest and largest organization of public health professionals, represents more than 50,000 members from over 50 public health occupations. More information is available at www.apha.org.

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