

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 28, 2011

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

We urge you to use the authority granted to you by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to permit stand-alone vision plans to meet the “pediatric vision care” component of the Essential Health Benefits Package (EHBP) offered both inside and outside of the health care insurance exchanges.

The inclusion of stand-alone vision plans in the health insurance exchanges is a matter of great importance to the millions of Americans who benefit from stand-alone vision coverage. Currently, 90% of Americans with vision coverage are covered through stand-alone plans that provide comprehensive vision coverage. Failing to allow stand-alone vision plans to participate in health insurance exchanges will cause significant disruption to the more than 60 million Americans who receive their vision care from such plans, including the bifurcation of coverage between parents and their children and potential loss of coverage.

When we passed the ACA into law last year, we provided the Secretary of Health and Human Services with a great deal of flexibility to define the EHBP, to define a qualified health plan, and to establish rules for the operation of exchanges. Therefore, we believe you have the authority and flexibility to determine that a stand-alone vision plan can satisfy the pediatric vision care element of the EHBP. Furthermore, the inclusion of stand-alone dental plans in the exchanges offers you a model for including stand-alone vision plans, as they share distinctive characteristics and a long history of being offered alongside one another in typical employer plans. Such models are not difficult to administer and are popular with consumers, as examples in the commercial market and in our own Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) demonstrate. Internet-based systems enable employers to offer these plans in conjunction with major medical plans, thus enabling consumers to have more choices and to find greater value in these important preventive and therapeutic benefits.

Allied to this, stand-alone vision plans provide vital preventive services that are cost-efficient and save money in the long-run. Research has found that individuals who have stand-alone vision plans are more than twice as likely to receive vision exams and preventive services as those who have vision coverage bundled with major medical coverage. Those who use their vision coverage can also benefit from early diagnosis and treatment of potentially debilitating and expensive eye conditions, as well as detection of chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

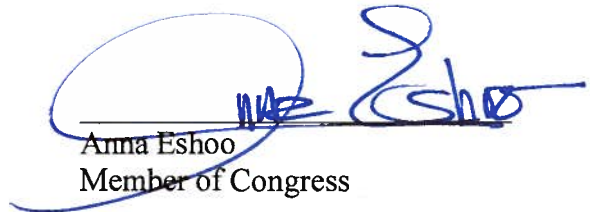
We believe the promise of the ACA is that, for the first time, it will give American families peace of mind about the health insurance coverage that they have, and for those without, it will finally provide the coverage for which they have always hoped. However, we are concerned that not allowing stand-alone vision plans to participate in the exchanges will disrupt the current coverage of millions of Americans and will impair the ability of those without vision coverage to obtain the proven benefits of a stand-alone vision plan.

Thank you for considering this very important issue. We urge you to take advantage of the broad authority we granted you to allow stand-alone vision plans to meet the pediatric vision component of the EHBP both inside and outside of exchanges. We look forward to your reply and stand ready to assist you in the successful implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Sincerely,



Doris O. Matsui
Member of Congress



Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress



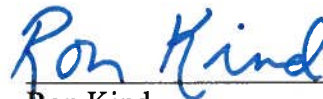
Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress



Mazie Hirono
Member of Congress



Steve Israel
Member of Congress



Ron Kind
Member of Congress



Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress