



POLICY & ACTION FROM CONSUMER REPORTS

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 24, 2017

Dear Representative:

On behalf of Consumers Union, the public policy and mobilization arm of nonprofit Consumer Reports, I write to express our strong opposition to the American Health Care Act (AHCA) and the newly added amendment to eliminate Essential Health Benefits (EHB) to urge you to vote against it.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the amended bill would still lead to 24 million consumers losing their insurance coverage by 2026. Furthermore, under this bill, even more out-of-pocket costs would be shifted on to consumers and plans would raise deductibles as consumers face higher premiums in light of reduced subsidies. Consumers simply can not afford higher premiums *and* higher cost-sharing. Last, the bill would imperil millions of the most vulnerable consumers who rely on Medicaid for coverage.

Now we have a new concern in addition to these grave flaws. The amendment introduced last night to eliminate EHBs effectively removes protections against discrimination for pre-existing conditions and would leave consumers at the mercy of insurance companies. Without EHBs, as we saw prior to the federal requirement, insurers will begin a “race to the bottom” and drop coverage for expensive conditions, maternity care, mental health and substance abuse issues, among other areas.

The elimination of EHBs would also return us to a time in which insurance companies placed annual and lifetime limits on plans. Currently, plans cannot limit care on an annual or lifetime basis that is part of the EHBs, which designates only the most essential categories of care for consumers. By eliminating EHBs, this legislation would effectively delete the ban on annual and lifetime limits for the very categories of care that people need most. This would be devastating for consumers with serious illnesses, like cancer.

We also strongly object to the manner in which this legislation has proceeded. The last-minute introduction of an amendment to eliminate EHBs came less than 24 hours before a vote is expected. This is unfair to every American consumer who will negatively impacted by this bill and who has not been given adequate time or a transparent and public process to understand bill’s full implications. A bill that touches the lives and health of all Americans should be publicly debated and consumers and voters should understand how the bill would affect them.

Americans deserve better, more affordable health care than is provided by the AHCA. We strongly urge you to vote against this bill.

Sincerely,

ConsumersUnion[®]

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