



For Immediate Release

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**In Advance of the Presidential State of the Union Address~
AMA On the State of Health Care**

WASHINGTON – As President Bush prepares to address the top domestic and foreign policy issues facing the nation, American voters consistently cite health care as a top domestic priority. While there is much good in the delivery of health care, there are also areas in need of great improvement, notably providing all Americans with health care coverage and reforming Medicare.

The American Medical Association (AMA), through its national health care policy agenda, has identified the priority health issues facing our nation, and calls on Congress, the Administration, and candidates for national office to support proposals that will help improve the health care system.

“Every American deserves health care coverage, and we need to build on the strengths of our system to make that happen,” said AMA President Ronald M. Davis, M.D. “As the nation’s largest physician organization, the AMA is leading the fight to get all Americans covered through our Voice for the Uninsured campaign.”

Through the Voice for the Uninsured campaign the AMA is reaching out to presidential candidates and members of Congress with its proposal, and to voters to urge them to vote with the issue of the uninsured in mind. Anyone can visit www.voicefortheuninsured.org to sign the AMA’s petition in support of the plan to cover the uninsured, so that legislative progress can be made in 2009. The AMA proposal to cover all Americans relies on a system of tax credits that will enable individuals to buy their own health insurance, which they would keep regardless of job changes. The AMA is also a strong advocate for long-term renewal of SCHIP, the government program that provides health care coverage to children in need.

“Congress made a promise to America’s seniors to provide them with health insurance through Medicare, but that promise means little if seniors can’t get in and see the doctor,” said Dr. Davis. An AMA survey found that 60 percent of physicians would be forced to limit the number of new Medicare patients they can treat if the 10 percent cut occurs this July. “Medicare’s physician foundation is at terrible risk because of a short-sighted payment plan that will cut physician payments 15 percent over the next year and a half, beginning this July.”

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Before the cut begins in July, Congress must take action to replace 18 months of cuts with payment increases that reflect medical practice costs. This will give Congress time to begin creating a new Medicare physician payment system that is based on medical practice costs. The current payment system is a barrier to improving the quality of patient care, as it prevents many physicians from purchasing new health information technology or spending extra quality time with patients on important preventive measures that can improve health and wellness.

Recent polls show that Americans are increasingly worried about health care costs. “As a nation, we now spend more than \$2 trillion per year on health care costs, which translates to about \$7,000 per person, and we need to ensure that we are getting high value for our health care spending,” said Dr. Davis. The AMA has identified four broad strategies to contain health care costs and achieve greater value for health care spending: reduce the burden of preventable disease; make health care delivery more efficient; reduce non-clinical health system costs that do not contribute to patient care; and promote value-based decision-making at all levels.

A leading cause of rising health care costs is treatment for patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. “We need to make an investment in helping patients quit smoking, avoid alcohol abuse, improve diet and increase exercise levels, as these lifestyle changes will not only lead to healthier lives, but lower health care costs,” advised Dr. Davis. “National rates of obesity and diabetes have doubled over the past 25 years, if we can get folks off the sofa and away from the pantry we can reduce these growth rates.”

Other key issues the AMA is committed to addressing in the year ahead include helping physicians use promising new technology to improve the quality of patient care, creating new quality measures that help physicians provide high quality care, and eliminating disparities in care.

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The AMA’s full advocacy agenda can be viewed at
<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/18274.html>

Contact:

Katherine M. Hatwell
Senior Public Information Officer
AMA Media Relations
202-789-7419
Katherine.hatwell@ama-assn.org