

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 17, 2021

Media Contact: Gabrielle Davies
Email: gdavies@commongroundhealthcare.org
Phone: (414) 386-8282



Common Ground Healthcare Cooperative Applauds Passage of American Rescue Plan
Bill Approved by Congress Will Greatly Expand Health Insurance Options for Wisconsinites

The CEO of Eastern Wisconsin's only non-profit health insurance cooperative called the COVID-19 relief bill passed by Congress "historic legislation that will help nearly every American afford good health insurance coverage." The bill, called the American Rescue Plan Act, is expected to be signed into law by the President this week.

Common Ground Healthcare Cooperative (CGHC) is Wisconsin's largest individual health insurance company, serving thousands of people that are not eligible for health insurance through Medicare, Medicaid, or an employer plan. CEO Cathy Mahaffey said the American Rescue Plan will make insurance more affordable for the hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites that do not fall into one of those three categories, so that no one buying insurance for themselves will have to pay more than 8.5% of their income toward a silver-level plan. The help will be in place for at least until the end of the 2023 plan year.

"This is a definite win for individuals and families struggling to afford individual health insurance," Mahaffey said. "In the past, consumers over 400% of the Federal Poverty Level did not qualify for premium assistance, and now that is changing."

Once the American Rescue Plan is implemented, she said, individuals and families that do not have employer or government-sponsored coverage will have their premiums capped through tax credits, saving Wisconsinites hundreds or even thousands of dollars in annual health insurance expenses each year. She said the bill will also increase tax credits to those already receiving them today, and these will be retroactive to January 1, 2021. There will be many no cost options available to consumers at the lowest income levels, and she expects that many people will be able to improve their insurance coverage by enrolling in free silver plans with much lower deductibles.

Mahaffey said consumers need to act now because there is currently a special open enrollment period allowing consumers to enroll in health insurance. Anyone looking to take advantage of this COVID-19 health insurance relief is to follow the Healthcare.gov website for updates and/or talk with a licensed health insurance agent or navigator. It may take up to a few weeks for Healthcare.gov to update its tax credit calculator to reflect the new amounts, but the website is also a good place to compare plans. The relief will be retroactive to January 1, 2021, so there is no need to wait to sign up for coverage.

People can enroll in coverage directly through Healthcare.gov, but if you need help choosing a plan, free help is available from licensed experts. People can get connected to help by calling 2-1-1 for assistance in locating either a licensed broker or navigator in their area.

The enrollment period is expected to close May 15, 2021 for 2021 coverage, so people should act quickly. Otherwise, they will have to wait to sign up for plan year 2022 to take advantage of the premium relief available.

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