



## **Now is Not the Time to Cut the Health Care Safety Net**

September 13, 2005

Dear Member of Congress:

Like most Americans, I was saddened and frustrated by the lack of effective response to Hurricane Katrina. As a nurse practitioner who has worked with the homeless, I am aware of the great struggles that face these American citizens. As President of the American Nurses Association, I am calling upon the U.S. Congress to halt plans to cut \$10 billion from the nation's health care safety net. Now is not the time to reduce Medicaid funding.

Medicaid is a key component of the United States health care system. One out of every three births, one out of every four children, eight million disabled citizens, and seventy percent of all nursing home care is funded by this program. Medicaid rolls have expanded over the last five years due to a dramatic increase in the number of Americans lacking health insurance.

Prior to the landfall of Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Census Bureau had collected data showing that the number of uninsured in America had increased by more than 800,000. In 2004, the number of Americans without access to health insurance reached 45.8 million. This does not include the thousands upon thousands of Americans who have lost everything, including health care coverage, as a result of this disaster. Many of these people will require access to medical and mental health services for many months to come.

I know that the lack of health insurance often leads to delayed care, impaired health, and greater mortality. ANA finds it unconscionable that Congress would consider proceeding with Medicaid cuts at a time when the human needs of our fellow Americans is so great. America's nurses hope that compassion and common sense will prevail, and our nation will continue its fine tradition of providing basic services to those who require them. The first step in this direction is to abandon plans to cut funding for health care for the medically needy and indigent. Now is not the time to reduce access to needed health care services.

Sincerely,

Barbara Blakeney, MS, RN  
President  
American Nurses Association