



February 18, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
& Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
& Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairman Wyden, and Ranking Member Crapo:

I am writing to express support from the National Council on Aging (NCOA) for the nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra as the next Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

NCOA is a trusted national leader working to ensure that every person can age well. Since 1950, our mission has not changed: Improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. NCOA empowers people with the best solutions to improve their own health and economic security—and we strengthen government programs that we all depend on as we age.

Attorney General Becerra has been a longstanding champion for affordable health coverage and access, particularly for Americans in greatest need. He has deep knowledge and passion for improving health care for patients and consumers, not powerful special interests.

As a 12-term member of Congress and a member of the House Ways and Means Committee's Health Subcommittee, Becerra demonstrated his expertise on a broad range of critical health care issues facing our nation. While playing a leadership role in providing health coverage to millions of uninsured and underinsured Americans under the Affordable Care Act and championing improvements to women's health, he also authored Medicare proposals focused on improving care for beneficiaries in need, including those that would:

- Increase access to physical therapy by repealing arbitrary limits on Medicare coverage for outpatient rehabilitation therapy
- Expand Medicare coverage of medical nutrition services
- Strengthen low-income Medicare beneficiary protections and assistance

NCOA had the privilege of working closely with then-Rep. Becerra and his staff on legislation he introduced in 2007 and 2009 to make health care more affordable for low-income Medicare beneficiaries whose fixed incomes made it difficult to afford rising health care costs. His Medicare Savings Program Improvement Act would have made it easier to meet stringent asset test eligibility requirements. These restrictions continue to unfairly penalize low-income older adults who did the right thing during their working years by putting away a modest nest egg of savings, thereby disqualifying them from receiving the help they need. Becerra also recognized the need to improve protections against increasing copayments and deductibles only available for low-income older Americans with annual incomes below 100% of poverty (\$12,880 in current dollars).

More recently, as Attorney General of the largest state in the nation and managing 4,800 employees, Becerra has continued to be deeply involved in crafting health policies that benefit consumers, including:

- Taking action to make hospital care more affordable and increase transparency and competition by addressing monopolistic practices that drive up prices and exploit market power for profit
- Reducing prescription drug costs by addressing anti-competitive pay-for-delay agreements, through which brand name drug companies have been able to delay the entrance of less expensive generics into the market
- Leading a multistate coalition to fight against the Trump Administration's "Healthcare Refusal Rule," which would disproportionately impact communities of color, LGBTQ+ communities, and women seeking health care services by allowing medical staff to refuse life-saving care to patients based on personal objection

Attorney General Becerra's knowledge and experience will help our nation to effectively address our current public health crisis. Becerra's degrees in economics and law from Stanford University have helped provide him with an in-depth understanding of health care financing issues and how complex health laws and regulations impact those in need.

His skills and experience in working with Congress cannot be underestimated. There is much that must and can be done to improve our flawed health care system, such as promoting equity, addressing health disparities, and overcoming barriers to care. His understanding of what can and cannot be done, and how to combine good policy and good politics are desperately needed to effectively address these serious challenges.

Finally, his appointment would be historic. A former chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Becerra was the first Latinx person to serve as a member of the powerful Committee on Ways and Means and would be the first to serve as Secretary of HHS.

Attorney General Becerra is highly qualified to lead America's efforts to improve our flawed health care system for Americans of all ages. NCOA strongly urges members of the Senate Finance Committee to vote in favor of and for the Senate to promptly confirm his nomination.

Sincerely,

Ramsey Alwin
President and CEO
National Council on Aging