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Senate health care plan misses the mark

Statement from Greg Vigdor, AzHHA President and CEO

PHOENIX, AZ – The Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association has issued the following statement regarding draft healthcare legislation introduced today by the U.S. Senate:

“For months, the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association has been calling on our leaders in Washington to come up with a workable healthcare plan that addresses lingering challenges in the areas of choice, access and cost. Upon the House’s passage last month of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) – a categorical failure, by these standards – our best hope was that Senate members would set it aside and start over. Regrettably, they did not.

“To be fair, the legislation produced by the Senate today is not an exact replica of the House’s AHCA. But its spirit – and the consequences if passed – are equally troubling. Of paramount concern is the devastating impact the measure would have on the Medicaid program and the 73 million Americans who depend on it.

“On the one hand, the gradual phasing-out of Medicaid expansion under the Senate plan would give states like Arizona more time to identify funding and other alternatives before the program is rolled back. On the other hand, the funding mechanism proposed by the Senate could mean deeper, more painful cuts to Medicaid down the road.

“Regardless, this bill is the wrong approach. Reduced Medicaid enrollment means more people without health coverage. This inevitably will result in a massive shift of financial risk and burden from the federal government to states, local healthcare providers and Arizona patients and families.

“Among its multiple negative impacts, the legislation will be a drag on Arizona’s fight against opioid abuse. More than 790 Arizonans died from opioid overdoses last year, and Governor Ducey has rightly declared this a public health emergency. But tens of thousands of Arizonans on Medicaid are battling substance abuse and receive treatment services via this critical program. The nearly \$1 trillion in Medicaid cuts envisioned by this legislation will undermine the war on opioid abuse and put more of our neighbors, friends and families at-risk.

“The simple fact is there is much we don’t know about this legislation – a function of the closed-door process through which it was developed. Even the House bill, while fatally flawed, went through a public hearing process before going to a Floor vote. I understand there is a time to play politics – but this is not it. We’re talking about reforms that could reshape healthcare in this country for millions of people and for generations to come. Our leaders in Washington must allow this critical issue the discourse it deserves.

“As always, the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association stands ready to support responsible reforms to our nation’s healthcare system that put patients, people and communities first. We will continue to communicate our opposition to this legislation directly to our Senators in Washington, and we ask that you do the same.”

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About AzHHA

AzHHA is Arizona’s statewide association for those organizations and individuals devoted to collectively building better healthcare and health for the patients, people and communities of Arizona. Founded in 1939, AzHHA’s objective is to improve healthcare through Better Care, Better Health and Lower Costs with the ultimate goal of making Arizona the healthiest state in the nation. For more information, please contact communications@azhha.org or call (602) 445-4300.