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The Latino Coalition Joins ‘Health IT Now’ Coalition

– Calls on Congress to Move Fast on Interoperable Healthcare IT –

Washington, D.C. – The Latino Coalition (TLC) today joined the Health IT NOW coalition. The coalition, chaired by former Senator John Breaux and former Congresswoman Nancy Johnson, unites patients, practitioners and employers to push for federal legislation this year to promote a connected health care IT system. The coalition’s initiatives include educating both Congress and the public on the life-saving—and cost-saving—benefits of health care IT.

“Interoperable healthcare IT is one of the great missed opportunities for better quality of life, the saving of lives and cost savings for everyone”, said TLC President Robert Deposada. “This bipartisan coalition will be a great asset to get Congress moving on legislation to address this important issue that affects every community in this country, particularly those with difficulty communicating with their physicians. Hispanic Americans will be one of the great benefits of having interoperable healthcare IT.”

In a 2005 report on healthcare interoperability from the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the case was made for the importance of incorporating an information technology system to make health care more accessible, safer and more cost effective. The study, “Ending the Document Game,” stated: “Although your airline ticket confirmation number, your rental car record, and even your cellular phone bills and calling history are available 24/7 on-line, your medical records are locked away in filing cabinets somewhere, partially handwritten and partially typed, stored in paper folders, and stacked alphabetically.”

“When medical information, test results and treatment records are available to any doctor or lab (with the permission of the patient), the problems of delays, inaccurate information and missing data will be virtually eliminated,” said TLC HealthCare Task Force Chairman Josh Valdez. “Care providers will be able to ‘pull up’ whatever they need on a patient whenever they need it, without waiting for transmission or mailing of information. Electronic systems will be easily backed up, so medical records will no longer be subject to loss from fire or storm damage.”

Latinos are disproportionately affected by some of the most serious health problems facing our country. Health conditions such as tuberculosis, depression, asthma, HIV, and certain cancers disproportionately affect Latinos and will require targeted, culturally appropriate interventions at the individual, institutional and community levels.

Education and prevention, lifestyle and health behaviors impact health status. However, a lack of health insurance impedes the ability of many Latinos to attain benefits of preventive care services.

As a result, Latinos often suffer from complications due to their chronic disease states. Latinos — whether or not they are insured — face the challenge of receiving care in a manner culturally and linguistically appropriate for the growing numbers of patients with limited English proficiency, as well as low levels of general and health literacy.

Not surprisingly, the Commonwealth Fund has found that one-third of Latinos have difficulty communicating with their physicians. Many have trouble reading and understanding written information in their doctors' offices, omit medications, miss office appointments and rely on hospital emergency departments for their general healthcare.

“With interoperable healthcare IT in place, patients will no longer have to fill out a complete medical history for every new healthcare provider they see. Healthcare professionals will save time because they will no longer have to gather information from multiple other providers,” Dr. Valdez added. “Those with difficulty communicating with physicians due to language or cultural barriers, will great benefit from this system.”

Latinos have the highest rates of uninsurance of any racial or ethnic group in the United States and are three times more likely to be uninsured than whites. The U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality estimates that in 2004, more than one-third of Latino Americans lacked health insurance coverage, compared with less than 19 percent of whites.

The financing of healthcare plays an important role in the ability of Latinos to access care. Despite their strong presence in the workforce, Latinos are mainly concentrated in low-wage, service-industry jobs where employers are less likely to offer health insurance and other employee benefits. Presently just one in four Latino workers has the benefit of employer sponsored insurance.

The Latino Coalition is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. TLC was established to address policy issues that directly affect the well-being of Hispanics in the United States. TLC's agenda is to develop and promote policies that will foster economic equivalency and enhance overall business, economic, and social development of Hispanics. For more information please visit our website at www.TheLatinoCoalition.com.

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