As pandemic rages, Americans to get health coverage lifeline

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President Joe Biden took actions to expand access to health insurance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) while reconsidering moves made during his predecessor’s term that drastically changed a key family-planning program.

On health insurance, the president ordered the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to open HealthCare.gov for a special enrollment period to run from Feb. 15–May 15. President Donald Trump resisted calls for such a special enrollment period when the global pandemic struck the U.S. in the spring of 2020.

"As part of our longstanding support for meaningful insurance coverage for all patients, the AMA supported passage of the Affordable Care Act, and we are pleased by the Biden administration actions ... to bolster access,” said AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD. “Opening the ACA exchanges provides a crucial lifeline at a time when people are losing insurance because of job layoffs as a result of the pandemic.”

Biden directed federal agencies to reexamine policies that:

- Undermine protections for people with preexisting conditions, including complications related to COVID-19.
- Undermine the health insurance marketplace or other markets for health insurance.
- Make it more difficult to enroll in Medicaid and the ACA.
- Reduce affordability of coverage or financial assistance, including for dependents.

The president also ordered review of demonstrations and waivers under Medicaid and the ACA that may reduce coverage or undermine the programs, including work requirements.

Dr. Bailey applauded “the administration’s move to eliminate barriers to Medicaid enrollment, which will repair holes in the health care safety net. Taken together, these actions will restore coverage to patients who are victims of the economic fallout of the pandemic.”

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Learn more about the AMA’s vision on health care reform, as well as the seven major downsides if the ACA is overturned by the Supreme Court.

**Family planning program**

Separately, Biden also directed HHS to take immediate action to consider whether to rescind regulations under its Title X family planning program.

The AMA applauded the move to “consider reversing the Trump administration rule that imposed drastic changes on the Title X program,” Dr. Bailey said.

“This is an important first step toward restoring access to comprehensive care for the millions of low-income and uninsured patients who depend on Title X for family planning services. It would also mean the government will no longer inappropriately interfere in the patient-physician relationship, and physicians will no longer be forced to violate the ethical standards of the medical profession,” she added.

In 2019, the AMA filed a lawsuit to block the previous presidential administration’s rule that would decimate the Title X program. The AMA and other parties have filed a petition requesting that the U.S. Supreme Court review *AMA v. Azar*, a case that seeks to overturn