



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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HEALTH CARE ADVOCATES AND HOSPITAL TRUSTEES CALL ON GOVERNOR PATERSON AND LEGISLATURE TO PROTECT ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

Just One Week After State Announces Closure of Cancer Screening Program, the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and Healthcare Trustees of New York State Warn That Essential Life-Saving Services Will Be at Risk if Future Cuts Are Made

ALBANY, N.Y. — A unified group of leading health care advocates and hospital trustees today joined hands to call on Governor Paterson and the Legislature to protect essential life-saving services as they address the ongoing state budget crisis. The call came just one week after the Department of Health cancelled a statewide breast cancer screening program for uninsured women when funding for the program ran out. Governor Paterson immediately reinstated the program, saying the state would “find the money” to fund it.

The group of advocates, which includes the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association of New York, and Healthcare Trustees of New York State (HTNYS), joined together to issue a dire warning that the state must also find the necessary resources to ensure that critical health care services, and the organizations that provide them, are adequately funded in the coming state budget determinations.

Governor Paterson has called the Legislature back to Albany for a special session on November 18, when they are slated to consider ways to save \$2 billion because of state budget deficits. In addition, the Governor will release his 2009-2010 Executive Budget proposal on December 16, which is expected to include significant cuts to health care services and providers.

Referencing the temporary cancellation of breast cancer screening services, Donald Distasio, Chief Executive Officer, American Cancer Society of New York and New Jersey, said, “We narrowly averted a crisis that would have put our state’s most vulnerable citizens at risk. We’re hopeful, but we’re not out of the woods. Denying uninsured New Yorkers the lifesaving tests they need is not the way to balance the budget. Doing so will only serve to leave a legacy of our leaders turning their backs on the uninsured.”

Caitrin Navarro, M.D., a board member of the American Heart Association and pediatrician with Schoolhouse Road Pediatrics in Albany, said, “New York has made great strides in many of its prevention programs, which save money in reducing future health care costs. The tobacco control program and the Healthy Heart program address heart disease, the number one killer in America, in a very real way. It wouldn’t make sense to cut programs that will ultimately save the state money.”

Michael Seilback, Vice President, Public Policy and Communications for the American Lung Association of New York, said, “It is essential that New York State continue to protect and promote lung health through state funding for tobacco control programs and programs that help children manage their asthma. Every dollar spent helping smokers quit and children avoid costly asthma attacks equals real savings in future health care costs.”

Sue Ellen Wagner, Executive Director of HTNYS, a statewide health care trustee education and advocacy group, said, “The economic crisis means more families will lose their employer-based health insurance, forcing them to rely on state-funded insurance to meet their basic and emergency health care needs. We are already seeing an explosion of Medicaid claims due to the downturn, which means that these essential, publicly funded services will be a virtual lifeline and safety net for thousands more families.”

“Make no mistake, if we make massive cuts to health care, families will fall through the safety net, with devastating human and financial consequences. We cannot allow that to happen,” Ms. Wagner remarked.

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