

## House Health Reform Bill Contains Key Domestic Violence Provisions

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The Family Violence Prevention Fund is praising the U.S. House of Representatives for including in its health reform bill a key prevention initiative that will advance the health care system's response to domestic violence and curb the tremendous health costs that result from it.

The legislation, passed on November 7, requires private insurers and the new Health Insurance Exchange to reimburse health care providers who assess patients for domestic violence and provide brief counseling and referrals. Health care providers can play a critical role in helping patients recognize the dangers associated with abuse, and connecting them to experts who can help them take steps to protect themselves and their children – if providers are given the time, training and supports to do so.

The reform bill also contains an important measure to prohibit insurers from treating domestic violence as a pre-existing condition and discriminating against victims. The House health reform bill would put the prohibition into effect immediately. This protection is based on language in the Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act introduced for several years by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA).

“Doctors and other health care providers are in a unique position to identify when their patients are experiencing domestic violence, and connect them with local service providers who can save their lives,” said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. “We are absolutely delighted that the health insurance reform bill the House passed today contains these important provisions, and especially grateful to Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Representative Roybal-Allard for ensuring that the insurance non-discrimination provision can take effect immediately. We hope Congress will soon advance laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of domestic violence in home-owner and other forms of insurance as well.”

On average, four women are murdered in the United States each day by a current or former partner. In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that women experience two million injuries from intimate partner violence each year. This violence can have lifelong consequences; one study found that women who have experienced domestic violence are 80 percent more likely to have a stroke, 70 percent more likely to have heart disease, 60 percent more likely to have asthma, and 70 percent more likely to drink heavily than women who have not experienced intimate partner violence. A 2003 study found that 44 percent of victims of domestic violence talked to someone about the abuse, with 37 percent of women talking to their health care provider

In June, the Family Violence Prevention Fund organized a letter to congressional leaders requesting the inclusion of these and other provisions in health reform legislation. It was signed by: Academy on Violence and Abuse; American Civil Liberties Union; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; American Geriatrics Society; Break the Cycle; Gay and Lesbian Medical Association; International Association of Forensic Nurses; Jewish Women International; Legal Momentum; Madison County Sexual Assault Treatment Center; Maliseet Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Response Program; National Advisory Council on Violence and Abuse; National Alliance to End Sexual Violence; National Association of Social Workers; National Center for Victims of Crime; National Council of Jewish Women; National Network to End Domestic Violence; New York City Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence; Nursing Network on Violence Against Women, International; PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health; Sheila Wellstone Institute; Women's Law Project; Susan M. Hadley, MPH, representative of the Family Violence Prevention FORUM of the American Public Health Association; and F. David Schneider, MD, MSPH, Professor and Chairman of Family and Community Medicine, Saint Louis University.