

The Honorable Senator Edward M. Kennedy,
Chair, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
317 Russell Senate Office Building (SR)
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

The Arthritis Foundation supports the goals of the Affordable Health Choices Act. We strongly believe that this legislation is necessary to guarantee quality, affordable, essential health care for all Americans.

Arthritis is a painful and physically debilitating chronic disease. More than 100 diseases fall in the category of arthritis and affect 46 million adults in this country. By the year 2030, arthritis will affect 67 million people or 25% of the population¹. Nearly 300,000 children have this disease. The cost of arthritis to the U.S. economy in 2003 totaled \$128 billion, including \$81 billion in direct medical costs and \$47 billion in indirect costs lost earnings¹. Arthritis results in 992,100 hospitalizations and 44 million-outpatient visits¹.

The Arthritis Foundation applauds the Affordable Health Choices Act for the many provisions that would benefit all Americans, and particularly those impacted by a chronic disease or disability like arthritis. The provisions included for affordability, preventive services, the prohibitions of discrimination based on health status, the elimination of the annual or lifetime limits on coverage, requiring coverage of dependents up to 26 years of age, and the strategy to develop national quality and efficiency standards mirror the principles of the Arthritis Foundation and will greatly improve the American health care system. We support these goals and principles as outlined in the legislation.

As the Affordable Health Choices Act moves through the Senate, the Arthritis Foundation encourages you to consider the inclusion of: 1) Elimination of Medicare's 24-month disability wait period, 2) Establishment of a clear and unobstructed pathway for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve follow-on-biologics, and 3) Encourage the educational pursuit of underrepresented specialties in areas of primary and chronic care where specific unmet needs exist, including preventive medicine, geriatrics, pediatrics, and disease-specific areas such as juvenile arthritis.

Thank you for your leadership to reform the American health care system. If you or your staff would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact Amy Melnick, Chief Public Policy Office, at amelnick@arthritis.org, or me at 202-887-2918 or at bodonoghue@arthritis.org.

Sincerely,

Bernadette O'Donoghue
Director, Public Policy and Advocacy