

PRESS RELEASE

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**GROUPS REPRESENTING GEORGIA BUSINESSES,
HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS,
COUNTY GOVERNMENTS
LAUNCH MEDICAID COALITION**

ATLANTA – Several prominent groups representing Georgia businesses, health care providers and county governments announce a new statewide coalition geared to bolstering funding for Georgia’s Medicaid program. The diverse coalition, known as the ACCESS (A Community Coalition for Effective Sustainable Success) Healthcare Coalition, representing Georgia businesses, hospitals, physicians, nursing homes, dentists, pharmacists and county governments, is asking the state to increase its financial commitment to Georgia Medicaid in the wake of a series of payment cuts through the years that have threatened access, hurt health care providers and shifted costs to Georgia businesses.

For every dollar the state spends on its Medicaid program, the federal government contributes two dollars. Presently, as a result of decreased state contributions to Georgia Medicaid, millions of federal matching dollars are going to other states.

“The ACCESS Healthcare Coalition is the culmination of years of frustration with Medicaid funding,” said Joseph Parker, president of the Georgia Hospital Association. “Each year, Georgia health care providers are being asked to do far more for much less and we’ve finally reached a breaking point where many simply cannot afford to keep going. The end result is higher health care costs for all Georgians and decreased access to care.”

Currently, the state pays hospitals roughly 84 cents for every dollar hospitals spend in providing care to Medicaid patients. Furthermore, physicians are paid 30 percent less for treating Medicaid patients than what the federal government pays for the same care for Medicare patients. As a result, the ACCESS Healthcare Coalition was formed with four specific goals:

- Urge the passage of the Department of Community Health’s proposal in the 2008 Georgia General Assembly to raise Medicaid payments to providers by more than \$40 million.

(continued)

ACCESS Healthcare Coalition | A Community Coalition for Effective, Sustainable Services

Georgia Chamber of Commerce • Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce • Association of County Commissioners of Georgia
American Academy of Pediatrics - Georgia Chapter • American College of Physicians - Georgia Chapter • Georgia OB/GYN Society
Georgia Academy of Family Physicians • Georgia Dental Association • Georgia Healthcare Association • Georgia Hospital Association

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Statewide Medicaid Coalition Launches – continued

- Maximize federal matching dollars for Medicaid leaving no money on the table.
- Eliminate the need for Georgia health care providers to recoup Medicaid underpayments by cost-shifting to the Georgia business community.
- Pay all Georgia health care providers — hospitals, physicians, nursing homes, dentists and pharmacists — reasonable costs by 2011 for providing care to Medicaid recipients.

With the start of the 2008 Georgia General Assembly less than a week away, coalition leaders will emphasize to lawmakers that the group is not advocating for an expansion of government entitlement programs, but is calling on the state to simply pay the full costs of an existing program. Nationwide, Georgia ranks 39th in Medicaid spending per enrollee, spending nearly \$800 per recipient less than the national average and more than \$400 behind the average in the southeastern region. The present underfunded system continues to devastate Georgia health care providers.

“One of the greatest threats to Georgia’s physician community is continued underpayments for Medicaid recipients,” said Pat Cota, executive director of the Georgia Obstetrical & Gynecological Society, representing more than 900 physician members. “Many physicians have had no choice but to stop treating Medicaid recipients altogether or to severely limit the number of Medicaid patients that they can treat. It’s a decision that no physician wants to make and we hope our participation in this unique coalition will make a positive difference for all physicians and their patients.”

Another key message of the coalition is that contrary to popular belief, the Medicaid funding issue affects the state’s entire population, not just those individuals on Medicaid. When the state fails to adequately pay providers for the care of Medicaid recipients, those shortfalls are eventually passed to those people with private health care insurance putting additional pressure on Georgia businesses who are already struggling to keep pace with rising health care insurance premiums.

“One of the biggest concerns that Georgia businesses have is the rising cost of health care services,” said Georgia Chamber of Commerce President George Israel. “When government programs such as Medicaid are underfunded, those shortfalls are ultimately passed on to the Georgia business community in the form of higher health care premiums. It’s an issue that affects the health of the business community statewide and our ability to compete with other states.”

Organizations participating in the ACCESS Healthcare Coalition are the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, the American Academy of Pediatrics – Georgia Chapter, the American College of Physicians – Georgia Chapter, the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians, the Georgia Dental Association, the Georgia Health Care Association, the Georgia Hospital Association, the Georgia OB/GYN Society and the Georgia Pharmacy Association.

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