

June 12, 2006

The Honorable Jerry Lewis  
Chairman  
U.S House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey  
Ranking Member  
U.S House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lewis and Ranking Member Obey:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge your support for the President's request of \$169 million for Health Information Technology in his fiscal year 2007 Budget request. These funds will allow Secretary of Health and Human Services, Michael Leavitt, to advance efforts in achieving the President's goal of electronic health records (EHRs) for all Americans within 10 years and begin positive change in our healthcare system.

Of the total budget request of \$169 million, \$116 million would be allocated to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC), which is key in achieving the President's goal. Members of both Houses and parties recognize that use of health information technology (IT) help reduce medical errors to enable a more efficient and effective health care system. Achieving this goal will require a long-term leadership commitment from the public and private sectors. Funding the President's request will help demonstrate Congress's leadership in taking the first few critical steps.

In fiscal year 2006, the Office of the National Coordinator utilized allocated funds of \$36.1 million to help lay the building blocks for EHRs by awarding contracts to: (1) develop four prototypes for a Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN) architecture; (2) convene stakeholders to develop, prototype, and evaluate a harmonization process for achieving a widely accepted and useful set of health IT standards that will support interoperability among health care software applications (particularly EHRs); (3) develop criteria and an evaluation process for certifying EHRs, other health care information technology products and the infrastructure or network components through which they interoperate; and (4) address privacy and security policy questions affecting interoperable health information exchange (HIE) in 22 states and territories with selected other states to follow. The latter privacy and security contracts are jointly managed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and ONC.

At a meeting in May, the American Health Information Community (AHIC), which advises the Secretary on making health records digital and interoperable, gave final approval to recommendations of the Workgroups on Electronic Health Records, Chronic Care, Consumer Empowerment and Biosurveillance. Representing broad private-public stakeholder interests, AHIC supports the work of ONC in advancing the President's goal.

The President's Budget request calls for \$50 million to fund grant programs administered by the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ), same as the Fiscal Year 2006 amount. These funds will be used to advance the use of health IT to enhance patient safety. AHRQ's investment in hospital safety has already demonstrated the importance of patient safety reporting systems, computerized practitioner order entry and decision support systems to key stakeholders and policymakers. As part of the agency's budget for health IT, AHRQ will provide \$29 million for the Ambulatory Patient Safety Program with an additional \$6 million in general Patient Safety funds. The funds spent on patient safety will complement and contribute to the overall goals and

objectives of the President's health IT initiative, the American Health Information Community, and those of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

We strongly urge you, at a minimum, to fully fund the President's Budget request for healthcare information technology. We must advance the work of creating an interoperable healthcare system that improves the quality of care while enabling a more efficient and effective healthcare system.

cc: The Honorable Ralph Regula, Chairman and David Obey, Ranking Member, U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Sincerely,

American Benefits Council  
American Clinical Laboratories Association  
American College of Physicians  
American Health Information Management Association  
Business Roundtable  
eHealth Initiative  
Eastman Kodak Company  
Greenway Medical Technologies  
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society  
HR Policy Association  
IBM  
Intel  
National Business Group on Health  
NCR  
Oracle  
The ERISA Industry Committee  
The National Alliance for Health Information Technology  
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce