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**The National Association of Children's Hospitals'
Applauds the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act's"
Focus on Children's Unique Health Care Needs**

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The National Association of Children's Hospitals (N.A.C.H.), which represents more than 100 children's hospitals across the country, supports the efforts of the new "Patients' Bill of Rights Act" to focus on children's unique health care needs in protecting consumers' access to appropriate health care in their health plans.

The bill, sponsored by Senators Thomas Daschle and Edward Kennedy in the Senate and Representatives John Dingell and Richard Gephardt in the House, is right on target with broad public support for providing children both access to appropriate pediatric specialty care and the collection of data needed to assess the experience of children in managed care.

According to a recent national poll conducted and analyzed by the bipartisan polling team of Lake Sosin Snell Perry and Associates and The Tarrance Group, 87 percent of respondents favor having "Congress require HMOs and other insurance companies to provide children with access to pediatric specialists, like pediatric heart specialists and surgeons, and to hospitals that specialize in treating children."

Support was strong across all segments of the population, regardless of party affiliation, race, or gender. In fact, the strongest support was among individuals who identified themselves as favoring HMOs and managed care plans. In addition, even when told that such provisions could increase the cost of health insurance premiums, people still responded by a margin of 73% to 23% in favor of assuring children's access to pediatric specialists.

The poll, which was commissioned by N.A.C.H., also found that 87 percent of respondents favor "Congress requiring HMOs and other insurance companies to measure and report to the public specifically on the quality of children's health care they provide." Clearly, the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act" reflects the strong opinion of the American public.

In expressing its own support, N.A.C.H. also highlights a number of other provisions, which are important to all health care consumers, including children. They include, among others, assurances of continuity of access to specialists when there is a change

in health plans, grievance appeals procedures for enrollees seeking reconsideration of denials of care, and "prudent layperson" standards for ensuring access to emergency-room care.

Managed care has great promise, both to improve access to appropriate health care and to achieve sustainable health care spending. The fulfillment of this promise will depend in part on reaching agreement on minimum standards for how health plans should meet consumers' needs. This promise is especially important for children, who can benefit so much from managed care's focus on primary and preventive care, but who also require assurance of access to specialty care services for their unique health care needs.

Compared to adults, children have different sizes, stages of physical and mental development, health conditions, economic vulnerability and dependence on others, all of which result in their often requiring different kinds of health care, delivered with different kinds of expertise, than adults require.

To be sure, the private sector has its own important responsibilities for accountability of health coverage, through voluntary accreditation and standards. But the public sector does, too, since it accounts for 40 percent of all health care spending, and it is paying for the health care of so many vulnerable Americans – the elderly, disabled, and children of low income families. Medicaid alone pays for the health care of one quarter of all children and one-third of all infants. With the implementation of the new State Children's Health Insurance Program funding on top of Medicaid, it is foreseeable that the public sector could become responsible for the health care of as many as 30 percent to 40 percent of all children.

In addition, given that children account for such a small part of the total health care economy – less than 15 percent of personal health care spending – their needs alone will not command the economic focus of the competitive marketplace. The public sector, through efforts such as the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act," can help to ensure that children's unique health care requirements receive that needed focus, which their economic clout in the market is not sufficient to achieve.

Children's hospitals often have missions of serving all of the children of their communities, through clinical care, education of health care providers, research, and advocacy devoted to children's unique health care needs. They have extensive experience in serving children covered by managed care, particularly children who are enrolled in Medicaid managed care plans. Children assisted by Medicaid represent, on average, about 45 percent of the care provided by freestanding acute care children's hospitals.