

WASHINGTON, DC – Members of the “Tri-Caucus” – made up of Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) – today joined with House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi to introduce the “Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act,” ground-breaking legislation that addresses persistent healthcare disparities by providing access to quality medical treatment for minority patients across the country.

CAPAC Chair Mike Honda (D-CA) also welcomed members of the Congressional Native American Caucus, who join the Tri-Caucus in targeting the issues – such as lack of insurance and language barriers – that often prevent minority patients from getting timely and effective healthcare. In particular, minority populations suffer a disproportionate lack of health insurance that contributes to inadequate health treatment.

The Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act targets the following goals:

- Expanding health coverage;
- Removing language and cultural barriers;
- Improving workforce diversity;
- Supporting and expanding programs to reduce health disparities;
- Improving data collection;
- Ensuring accountability; and
- Strengthening health institutions that serve minority populations.

“For too long, the Bush Administration has tolerated the national tragedy of having one out of every three Hispanics and 7.4 million African Americans without health insurance, and other grave health care disparities that minorities face” House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi said. “Fortunately, Democrats have a plan to expand health insurance and improve the quality of health care in order to address these inequalities. Democrats are committed to ensuring that all communities have equal access to quality and affordable health care.”

“Despite the increasing diversity of our nation, our healthcare system is not meeting the needs of our community, and our racial and ethnic minorities are all too often denied the high quality healthcare that most Americans receive,” Congressman Honda said. “This bill will help minority communities overcome obstacles to obtaining quality healthcare in the United States, including the cultural and language barriers that our current healthcare system is ill-equipped to address.”

“If this Congress really wants to eliminate the health disparities plaguing our communities, then it should bring legislation to the floor that addresses the health care problems of all American families,” said Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis (CA-32), Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus’ Health Task Force. “We must use the Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act as a model of how we can actively eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in our communities nationwide. It is an ambitious bill – but this problem will take an ambitious solution”

“The state of minority health care under the Bush Administration has deteriorated precipitously and has continued to decline in his second term,” noted Melvin L. Watt (D-N.C.), Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. “The Congressional Black Caucus is committed to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care and believes that the Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act should be a priority for our nation. Unfortunately, disparities between African Americans and other Americans continue to exist in every aspect of our lives, making it more difficult, and often impossible, for African Americans to reach their full potential.”

“The bill will be introduced in the House this evening and by all indications, it will be introduced in the Senate on Friday,” said Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust. “While it specifically addresses the needs of minorities, this bill is also an investment in the health of all of America, as it helps contain the ever-spiraling cost of care that prohibits many from living healthy lives.”

“The developing divergence between the quality of health care minority communities receive versus that of other communities is a troubling trend,” said Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU), Chair of the CAPAC Health Task Force. “These disparities are particularly prevalent on Guam and other Pacific islands communities, and an immediate remedy must be found so that the gap in care can be closed. The minority health bill is a comprehensive proposal to address these most basic health care concerns.”

"This bill is vital to the health status of Native Americans, and is important for ensuring that all Americans are afforded their right to adequate, affordable and accessible health care," said Rep. Frank Pallone, vice-chair of the Congressional Native American Caucus. "Our legislation guarantees Indian Health Service funding and elevates the Service's director to an Assistant Secretary of Health to better develop and promote Indian health policy."

Honda noted that approximately one-third of all Asian Pacific Americans live in linguistic isolation. Where patients face such language barriers, he stated, they cannot interact with health care providers and social service agencies effectively.

"Democrats understand that providing interpreters and translation services is an important component in improving the quality of health care in this country," Honda said. "In solidarity with the Democratic Leadership and the Minority Caucuses, we call upon our colleagues in Congress, and we call upon our Chief Executive in the White House, to support this legislation to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in this country."

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The Congressional Tri-Caucus includes the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. The objectives of the Congressional Tri-Caucus are to promote the public health and well-being through legislative action, social outreach, and political engagement. To this end, the Tri-Caucus seeks to preserve our Nation's commitment to fair and equitable treatment to all Americans. The Tri-Caucus has worked together for over a decade to ensure that the Congressional legislative agenda reflects the health challenges of all Americans.