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## **AOA-LED GROUP URGES OBAMA TO INCREASE HEALTH CARE ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY BY COMBATING PROVIDER DISCRIMINATION**

### ***Broad Coalition to Back New Provider Non-Discrimination Safeguards to Ensure Patient Access and Choice***

*Washington, D.C. (December 4, 2008)* — The American Optometric Association (AOA), the voice of more than 36,000 frontline providers of eye and vision care in America, and eleven other organizations comprising the Patients' Access to Responsible Care Alliance (PARCA) today called on President-elect Barack Obama and Congressional leaders to support legislation to increase access to and affordability of quality health care services nationwide by combating health care provider discrimination.

In a letter to the President-elect sent in advance of the 2008 Colorado Summit on Health Care hosted by U.S. Senator Ken Salazar (D-Colo) and featuring a keynote address by Secretary of Health and Human Services nominee, Senator Tom Daschle, the AOA and its coalition partners urged support for new legislative safeguards for patient access to care and provider choice as a foundation for health care reform in 2009.

The PARCA coalition, which collectively represents the concerns of hundreds of thousands of non-MD/DO health care professionals and the millions of patients they serve in communities across the country, is seeking to bar insurance and managed care companies from excluding entire classes of non-MD health providers from participating in their plans.

"With President-elect Obama and his team preparing to take office and the new Congress set to begin to consider health care reform proposals, this is an important time for the AOA and our coalition partners to be heard on the discrimination issue," said Peter H. Kehoe, OD, AOA President. "Optometry can and will play a positive role in the national debate over health care reform and we aim to do so on the strength of our members, our patients and along with other groups that share our commitment to reform based on patient access and choice."

The PARCA coalition's position was outlined in an open-letter sent to President-elect Obama and to key leaders in Congress today. In part, the letter stated:

"As you go about the important work of improving the existing employer-based reimbursement system...we request that you lend your support to the adoption of appropriate legislative provisions that would prevent existing healthcare plans, as well as any new federal plan, from discriminating against classes of health care providers with respect to plan participation, indemnification, and

reimbursement...The elimination of such discrimination and the establishment of a "level playing field" for all providers would more appropriately focus the provisioning of patient care towards those issues dealing with the efficiency of care delivery and the important need to improve quality outcomes."

The legislative safeguards that the AOA and the coalition seek would also prevent insurance plans from discriminating against providers when it comes to the reimbursement of services provided by non-MD health professionals.

"Optometrists and our patients see the systemic costs of discrimination against providers by health plans. Such discrimination defies principle, is anti-competitive in nature, denies patient choice, restricts access to care and, in general, results in a weaker health delivery system with inferior outcomes," Dr. Kehoe added.

### **About the American Optometric Association (AOA)**

*The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.*

*American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.*

*Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).*

### **About the Patients' Access to Responsible Care Alliance (PARCA)**

*PARCA is a coalition of organizations that represent the interests of millions of patients and non-MD/DO healthcare providers. It aims to provide federal policymakers with access to information from all areas of the healthcare community, in order to assist in the formulation of responsible, well-rounded healthcare policy. The coalition is committed to quality, cost-effective care, and ensuring patients have options in the delivery of such care. For more information, visit [accessparca.com](http://accessparca.com)*

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