

Joint Center joins with Congressional Tricaucus in seeking comprehensive healthcare reform

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WASHINGTON—The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute joined leaders of the Congressional Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander Caucuses Tuesday in calling for significant attention to the health needs of communities of color as Congress considers comprehensive healthcare reform, saying otherwise, the health inequities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities will persist.

Dr. Brian D. Smedley, Vice President and Director of HPI, noted that members of the Tri-Caucus have introduced “The Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2009.” He said that a large body of research finds that many minorities face persistent barriers to accessing high-quality health care, even when they possess the same kinds of health insurance and have the same incomes as whites. In addition, many minorities live and work in communities that are plagued by a relative abundance of health risks – such as hazardous waste facilities and fast-food stores – and suffer from a relative lack of health-enhancing resources, such as safe places for exercise and recreation. The Tri-Caucus legislation would address many of these problems, but Congress also has an opportunity to act as it debates health reform legislation this summer, Smedley noted.

"Congressional action is critically important to address the problems of uneven health care quality, rising costs, and high rates of uninsurance," said Dr. Smedley. "But these problems cannot be addressed without attending to the needs of racial and ethnic minorities, many of whom suffer from unacceptable inequities in U.S. healthcare systems. Research evidence points to the need for comprehensive strategies to achieve equity in health care, such as the kind that the Congressional Tri-Caucus leadership is calling for."