



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 6, 2003

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Broad Coalition Applauds Bipartisan Introduction of Bill to Preserve Access to Health Care & Curb Litigation Costs

**Medical Liability Costs Force Practices to Close and Leave Patients Without Care
HCLA Members Call on Congress to Pass the HEALTH Act**

WASHINGTON, DC — The Health Coalition on Liability & Access (HCLA) called on Congress to pass the HEALTH Act of 2003. The bipartisan bill introduced yesterday by Rep. Jim Greenwood and sixty-five cosponsors will help curb the out-of-control liability costs that are leaving patients without care as health care providers in more than a dozen states are forced to drop vital services or close their practices.

Christian Shalgian, Chairman of HCLA, says, “The American public knows that patients and doctors are paying an unacceptable price for excess litigation. Our medical liability system is broken and threatening patients’ access to care. Congress can make a difference. We urge every member of Congress to support the HEALTH Act, a bill that represents a proven solution based on reforms Americans support.”

An independent poll released by Gallup yesterday shows 7-in-10 Americans (74%) believe rising medical liability insurance rates in health care today are a crisis or major problem. Most Americans (72%), support reforms contained in the HEALTH Act, such as measures that would guarantee injured patients full payment for lost wages and medical costs, and place reasonable limits on awards for “pain and suffering” in medical liability cases.

Runaway jury awards and meritless lawsuits have made medical liability insurance unaffordable and even unavailable in many states. Reports of access-to-care problems resulting from the liability crisis have increased dramatically in recent months. Nevada faced the closing of a key trauma center. Pennsylvania reports neurosurgeons departing the state. One in 11 obstetricians nationwide has scaled back their practices to gynecology only. Patients at four West Virginia hospitals had to be transferred out of state after surgeries were canceled by doctors who could no longer afford liability insurance.

“Month by month, the crisis worsens. Congress must take action now to see that injured patients are fairly compensated and to stop the runaway litigation that is making care unavailable and unaffordable to patients across the country,” says Shalgian. “The HEALTH Act will help to ensure that patients are able to receive the care they need.”

**HEALTH CARE LIABILITY EXPERTS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS
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For more details, visit www.hcla.org. Health Coalition on Liability & Access is a national advocacy coalition of more than fifty organizations representing doctors, hospitals, health care liability insurers, pharmaceutical companies, health care insurers, employers and health care consumers. HCLA believes federal legislation is needed to bring fairness, timeliness and cost-efficiency to America’s medical liability system.