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Americans Say Health Care Access Threatened by Liability Crisis **New Poll Indicates Americans Favor Common Sense Reforms**

Washington, DC: A new poll released today by the Health Coalition on Liability and Access (HCLA) reveals that Americans believe a growing crisis in health care liability is pushing health care costs up and forcing good doctors out of medical practice. By overwhelming margins (82 percent), Americans say their ability to get the health care they need is threatened by excessive litigation.

A significant majority (73 percent) of the Americans polled believe Congress should enact reforms to limit payments to trial lawyers from medical liability claims. A similar majority (71 percent) favors changes to the law to guarantee full payment for lost wages and medical expenses and place common-sense limits on payments for non-economic damages.

Christian Shalgian, Chairman of HCLA, says "Every day in this country, patients are denied the health care they need because the medical liability lottery has forced doctors out of medicine. The situation is getting worse – and the time for action is long overdue. We are committed to working with Congress and the Administration to keep the need for health care liability reform at the forefront of the national debate."

The poll was conducted in March 2004 for the Health Coalition on Liability and Access by Wirthlin Worldwide. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

The poll results demonstrate that most Americans believe:

Access to Quality Health Care is At-Risk: More than 8 in 10 (82 percent) of the Americans surveyed believe that doctors are being forced to leave their practices because excessive litigation has put the cost of medical liability insurance out of reach.

Cost of Health Care Rising Due to Excessive Lawsuits: By a huge margin, 72 percent of those surveyed said that health care expenses for all people are being driven up by the rising cost of medical liability lawsuits.

Too Many Frivolous Malpractice Lawsuits: The high number of medical liability lawsuits is unjustified, according to 55 percent of the survey respondents. Only 16 percent say that the number of lawsuits against health care providers is lower than justified.

Common-Sense Reforms Are Needed: Three-quarters of Americans want Congress to pass reforms to fix the medical liability crisis. 72 percent favor a law that guarantee full payment for lost wages and medical expenses but limit non-economic damages; 73 percent want to limit the amount of money personal injury trial lawyers can get from the excessive litigation settlements their clients receive.

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 seventy-five organizations representing doctors, hospitals, health care liability insurers, pharmaceutical companies, long-term care facilities, 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.