

June 1, 2011

Arthritis Foundation Statement on Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Program

- Good Morning.
- I am Dr. John Klippel, President and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation, the largest voluntary health organization dedicated to raising awareness and reducing the impact of arthritis.
- Arthritis strikes one in every five adults—that is 50 million Americans-- and 300,000 children, and is the nation's leading cause of disability.
- Arthritis affects families, communities and our nation in ways that need to be more widely recognized and addressed.
- We're pleased to hear that, within the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Program (PCIP), eligibility requirements will be relaxed and that premiums will be reduced.
- These changes are important for all people with chronic diseases, like arthritis.
- These changes will offer more Americans, with pre-existing conditions, an option to access the care they need without the discrimination that has occurred against those who have debilitating, expensive diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, which currently affects nearly 2 million Americans.
- People who have rheumatoid arthritis are often struck with this disease in the prime of their working lives, and suffer unrelenting and excruciating joint pain and inflammation. Often, they go months before they are properly diagnosed.
- Once diagnosed, rheumatoid arthritis patients often are prescribed extremely powerful biologic drugs, and while they can limit the effects of this disease; they are also extremely expensive and have potentially serious side effects. Access to rheumatologists and medications are essential to a good outcome for a patient with arthritis.
- At the Arthritis Foundation, we often hear from patients who struggle to get access to doctors, specialists and the proper medications to treat their disease because they have been denied insurance. It may be a result of a change in jobs, the loss of a job with health insurance, or a self-employed person who can't afford to buy in the individual market or is covered but not for their disease.
- No one asks to be stricken with a disease like rheumatoid arthritis. It just happens. **No one** should be denied the ability to access a health plan that will help them get the care they need and deserve.

- This announcement is particularly timely as we come to the end of May, which is dedicated to raising awareness about arthritis.
- The Arthritis Foundation fully supports the Pre Existing Condition Insurance Plan and I pledge our support in educating the public about this landmark program. The seriousness of arthritis makes it unacceptable for people with it [or any other chronic disease] to be denied access to the care and medications they need for any period of time.
- The Arthritis Foundation is grateful to collaborate with the Secretary and the Administration in raising awareness about this program to help individuals without insurance and with pre-existing conditions.