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SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE LETTER TO MEDIC ARE ON QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS (QIOs)

Statement by David Schulke, Executive Vice President, AHQA

In a letter to CMS Director Mark McClellan, released to the media Monday, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley says he is concerned about recent allegations in the Washington Post that Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) lack accountability to the public, particularly in relation to the handling of beneficiary complaints about quality of care.

AHQA, which represents the national network of QIOs, takes very seriously the Senator's reaction to the Post coverage. We believe the Post has done the public a disservice by presenting an incomplete and unbalanced picture of the QIO program.

Senator Grassley is a longstanding champion of better health quality and a strong supporter of the QIO program, which devotes the great majority of its resources to working with providers and practitioners to improve quality of health care for all Medicare beneficiaries. Recent studies show that these efforts are paying off: QIO assistance is clearly helping doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and home health agencies to provide better care.

The Post's portrayal of the QIO program is at odds with this reality, focusing almost exclusively on the very small percentage of program activity devoted to beneficiary complaints. The way QIOs are required to handle complaints is a result of policy choices by Congress and CMS as interpreted by two federal courts. Although surveys show that 90% of beneficiaries are satisfied with how complaints are handled, it's clear that the process could be far more transparent. QIOs agree that what happened to David Schipp, the beneficiary featured in the Post article and cited by Senator Grassley, should not happen to any of us.

The IOM is currently undertaking a congressionally-mandated comprehensive review of the QIO program today, a process that AHQA actively supports. We look forward to continuing to work with Senator Grassley to make sure the public gets the value it expects from the QIO program.

The American Health Quality Association is dedicated to improving the safety and effectiveness of health care. AHQA represents the national network of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) that work with hospitals,

Advancing the Safety and Quality of Health Care Nationwide

medical practices, health plans, long-term care facilities, home health agencies, and employers to encourage the spread of best clinical practices and improve systems of care delivery. Visit: www.ahqa.org.