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**Family Physicians Urge State Leaders:
“Don’t ask poor, frail, elderly, or children to solve budget crisis”**

Testimony at Budget Hearing & Rally at Capitol on March 17

Sacramento – Family physicians are calling on Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and members of the State Legislature to look for alternatives, including increased revenues, to “trigger” (prevent) cuts in health and human service programs that appear imminent. Carla Kakutani, MD, will represent the 7,000-member California Academy of Family Physicians at a public hearing on the cuts at 10 a.m. tomorrow, March 17. She will also speak at a public rally outside the Capitol at 9 a.m. that day.

Family physicians oppose reducing health services and benefits for people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and others who rely on the State for health care services. “Trading the health of the people of California for a balanced budget is unconscionable,” said Kakutani, a family physician who practices in Winters, CA. “Surely our elected leaders can address the budget deficit in a humane and decent way instead of forcing the most vulnerable among us to suffer without essential care.”

The State budget passed on February 20 contained several cuts to health and human services, with an additional \$948 million in cuts scheduled to take effect on July 1 unless California receives at least \$10 billion in federal stimulus funds, a goal which most lawmakers believed was achievable given the size of the stimulus package. On the day after the Governor signed the budget, his staff announced that this goal might not be attainable. Since then, both the Legislative Analyst’s Office and the Department of Finance have made preliminary estimates that the amount of applicable federal stimulus money that can be counted toward the State’s General Fund will total just \$8 billion – roughly \$2 billion short of the level needed to avert the cuts.

“We want our State legislators to take ownership and responsibility for the damage these cuts will cause,” Kakutani said. “This is not an issue of what the Federal government does or doesn’t do. This is an issue of what the government of California does.”

Several revenue solutions were on the table during the last round of budget talks, she said. “We’re calling on legislators to have the courage to bring those back. The alternative – leaving people alone to suffer invisibly – is a cowardly way to balance a budget.”

Some of the health care and services cuts scheduled to take effect on July 1 include: State Social Security Income/State Supplementary Payment: \$267.8 million; CalWORKS: \$146.9 million; In-Home Support Services \$78 million; and Medi-Cal Optional Benefits: \$129.4 million. Among the Medi-Cal cuts are adult dental benefits – more than 1 million adults will lose coverage. Payment to public hospitals for indigent care will also be cut.

“Eliminating dental and health care under Medi-Cal, reducing access to in-home support services, decimating counties’ ability to provide benefits and services to those who need it most is irresponsible,” Kakutani said. “We’re calling on our leaders to take a more principled stand. Don’t ask the poor, frail, elderly, or children to solve budget crisis.”

The public hearing will take place at 10 a.m. on March 17 in Room 4203 of the State Capitol. The rally – to include physicians, homecare workers, In Home Support Service consumers, seniors, people with disabilities, and others – begins at 9 a.m. on the South Steps of the Capitol (N Street side).

About the California Academy of Family Physicians: *Since 1948, CAFP has been analyzing and disseminating trends and information to assist California’s family physicians in their practices. With more than 7,000 members, including active practicing family physicians, residents in family medicine, and medical students interested in the specialty. CAFP is the largest primary care medical society in California, and the largest chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Family physicians are trained to treat an entire family’s medical needs, addressing the whole spectrum of life’s medical challenges. FPs serve a broad base of patients in urban, suburban and rural areas, often in California’s most underserved areas.*