

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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America's Dirty Little Health Care Secret: For millions, *that's the way it is*

"America's health care system is neither healthy, caring, nor a system." -Walter Cronkite

Regarded in his day as "the most trusted man in America," newsman Walter Cronkite understood what those of us staring daily at the underbelly of the health care system long have realized: health care financing in the U.S. is structurally flawed and in need of comprehensive reform. Yet for decades, this understanding competed with political platitudes about our nation as home to "the very best doctors," "most advanced medical interventions," indeed the "best health care system in the world." These days, public opinion suggests America's dirty little health care secret is fully out of the bag. Troubled by the increasing number of uninsured Americans, skyrocketing costs, and poor health outcomes, a record 69 percent of Gallup Poll respondents agreed that "it is the responsibility of the federal government to make sure all Americans have health care coverage (November 2006)." Ethicist Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel assessed this change in public opinion in a recent edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association by noting that "if a politician declares that the United States has the best health care system in the world today, he or she looks clueless rather than patriotic or authoritative (May 2007)."

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls upon *Mobilizer* readers to take advantage of this welcome change in public opinion by advocating for Congressional action to extend the right to health care to all Americans.

First & Last; Highest & Lowest

Recently released data about the cost and quality of health care in the United States (nothing new and unsurprising for providers and advocates working with people experiencing homelessness) provides new ammunition for use in our continued advocacy work for universal health insurance. Though Americans pay the most for health care (indeed, at \$7,129 per capita, twice that spent in other industrialized nations), we get the poorest care for the money. According to a report from the Commonwealth Fund, "the U.S. health care system ranks dead last compared with five other nations on measures of quality, access, efficiency, equity, and outcomes (May 2007)." Unsurprisingly, the U.S. was the only nation among those studied that did not guarantee access to health care as a right of citizenship. Despite the increased cost, approximately 45 million people live without any type of health insurance for an entire year, and millions more are under-insured or insured only sometimes. An earlier report by the Commonwealth Fund found that among two dozen industrialized nations, the U.S. had the highest infant mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy for adults over 60 (September 2006). At least two Congressional vehicles to improve the health status of all Americans warrant our attention and advocacy.

The Countdown!

Don't count him out; help him count down. Former Presidential candidate Senator John Kerry (D-MA) is sending a message to his colleagues in Congress: fix the health care system or feel the pain. On April 25 during Cover the Uninsured Week, Senator Kerry introduced the Countdown to Coverage Act of 2007 (S.1221), an appropriately pointed "message bill" requiring Congress to pass legislation to ensure "accessible, affordable, and meaningful health insurance for all Americans" by the end of the 111th Congress. Failing to act by this deadline, Members would be required to pay 100 percent of their own health benefits.

Learning from What Works: Medicare for All

H.R. 676, the United States National Health Insurance Act, was introduced in this Congress by past Policy Symposium speaker Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) and nearly 70 co-sponsors. The measure would expand the cost-effective and administratively efficient Medicare program to all Americans through a modest payroll tax. Publicly funded through a "single payer" model and privately delivered through existing nonprofit providers, the plan would cover all medically necessary procedures as well as prescription drugs, mental health services, and addictions treatment.

The National HCH Council calls upon *Mobilizer* readers to act now in support of the Countdown to Coverage Act (S. 1221) and the United States National Health Insurance Act (H.R. 676). Both bills honor the human right to health care, would result in meaningful reform, and, by extending coverage to all Americans, would move us closer toward the day when health care in America can truly be called the best in the world. It doesn't have to be the way it is. Help us change it.

ACTION:

* **Read the National HCH Council's 2007 policy statement on universal health care** at <http://www.nhchc.org/Advocacy/PolicyPapers/UniversalHealthCareHomelessness2007.pdf>

* **Call, write and visit your Representative in support of health care for all.** We need additional co-sponsors for HR 676. Call or write your Representative about the need for a comprehensive universal health care system. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-2131. If you plan to attend the National HCH Conference, ask for an appointment to visit the Member on June 13-15.

* **Call, write and visit your Senators.** H.R. 676 has never been introduced in the Senate; ask them to introduce a companion bill. Encourage them also to support Senator Kerry's call to action by endorsing S. 1221. Locate your Senator at www.senate.gov or by calling the Capitol Switchboard.

* **Endorse H.R. 676.** Many organizations, city councils, labor unions, interest groups, and individuals (not to mention a few HCH projects) already have endorsed H.R. 676 and the single payer health care system it would create. Work with the leadership of your organization to secure its formal endorsement. Visit Physicians for a National Health Program and register your endorsement online at www.pnhp.org/resolution/.

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