

APHA 2009

AGENDA FOR HEALTH REFORM



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THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION (APHA) is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world. Founded in 1872, the Association represents a broad array of health providers, educators, environmentalists, policy-makers and health officials working at all levels both within and outside of government. APHA aims to protect all Americans and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and strives to assure community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States. Our goal is for the United States to become the healthiest nation in one generation.

As the new administration and Congress address health system reform, we have both the challenge and opportunity to think broadly about how to improve the health of our nation. Since the early 1900s, APHA has vigorously promoted the need for universal coverage for health care. This is a first essential step to achieve that end. However, to optimize our nation's health, we must do more. We must ensure the social and economic conditions that allow individuals and communities to be healthy. Shifting from a focus on treating illness, to providing community-based health promotion and preventive health services, will measurably improve health and control costs. The APHA Agenda for Health Reform highlights the most critical changes we must make to improve the public's health, based on long-standing APHA policies and the best current evidence.

Support Population Based Services That Improve Health

POPULATION BASED PROGRAMS deliver resources to the whole community and are proven to realize a more positive health impact than do individual interventions alone. These programs can target root causes of disease, disability and health disparities and can help achieve increased value for our health dollar.

- ◆ **Invest in population-based and community-based prevention, education and outreach programs** that have been proven to prevent disease and injury and improve the social determinants of health.
- ◆ **Address the chronic underfunding of the nation's public health system.** Increase funding for vital public health agencies and programs. Health reform must provide adequate and sustainable funding to address the growing demand placed on the federal, state and local public health agencies that protect and promote the nation's health. These include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other federal public health agencies along with state and local health departments.
- ◆ **Account for the real cost savings and cost avoidance of preventive and early intervention services at the individual and community levels through more accurate fiscal scoring methods.** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should be directed to develop and implement methods to more accurately score the costs savings associated with community-based and other prevention programs.
- ◆ **Develop, expand and monitor programs to reduce disparities in health.** Persistent health inequities and disparities mean that millions of Americans suffer from a disproportionately high burden of disease, disability and premature death. These disparities also impose an unacceptable fiscal cost. Supporting programs and system changes that have potential to address and eliminate these disparities during health reform offers an opportunity to significantly reduce costs and improve the health of these populations. Health reform must support funding for research to better understand the underlying causes of health disparities and to develop and support effective strategies that work to reduce their impact on long-term health and wellness.
- ◆ **Require methods to assess the impact federal policies and programs have on public health.** Health is intricately tied to community design and directly affected by policies and programs across various sectors, including housing, transportation, environment, land use, agriculture, labor, education, trade and the economy. Therefore, health reform legislation should require a health impact assessment for all new federal policies and programs.
- ◆ **Establish health goals and outcomes and require an annual "State of the Nation's Health" report to hold ourselves accountable.** Require an annual report to the nation that holds the system accountable for achieving agreed upon health goals and outcomes. The federal government should develop appropriate standardized measures and health status indicators, along with methods for collecting, reporting and analyzing such data. Key federal agencies like the National Center for Health Statistics and state entities such as vital statistics departments should be adequately supported to do this work. Additionally, the report should include data by patient demographic factors such as race and ethnicity, age, gender, primary language, socio-economic position, geographic location and health literacy.

Reform Health Care Coverage and Delivery

WE MUST ENSURE coverage for quality, affordable health care for all. This means covering the over 46 million uninsured, and improving the quality and safety of the health care system, including building a modern health information infrastructure.

- ◆ **Comprehensive health care coverage for all.** All people living in this country should have comprehensive benefits, including evidence-based clinical preventive services, management of chronic diseases and conditions, behavioral health, dental and vision care, and reproductive health services, without restrictions in coverage due to pre-existing conditions.
 - ◆ **Strong public programs.** Public programs serve vital functions in our health system. Safety net programs such as public health clinics and Veterans Administration health services provide direct services for particular populations that cannot be replaced by private providers. As people move from the rolls of the underinsured and uninsured, we must strengthen funding for these public programs to assure that patients do not fall through the cracks. In addition, strengthening and expanding public insurance programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP builds on what works best in our system. As a starting point, Medicare, which is consistently scored as the most efficient insurance program for health coverage, should be expanded as a coverage option for all.
 - ◆ **Access to affordable and high-quality health care for all.** Health reform must strengthen the health service delivery system to ensure access to timely, appropriate, culturally competent and affordable high quality health care services, and create an equitable distribution of resources nationwide.
- A fundamental shift in reimbursement and other policies that promote primary care is also required to ensure individuals are given the best opportunity for disease prevention or treatment at the earliest opportunity. A continued investment in health information technology that promotes achieving care of the highest quality, safety and efficiency is required.
- ◆ **First dollar support for evidence-based clinical preventive services.** Clinical preventive services are critical for long-term health and wellness. There are clear data indicating which clinical preventive services are most effective, but barriers still exist to providing and accessing these services. High priority, age appropriate, evidence-based clinical preventive services must be provided with no co-pays or co-insurance in all public and private health insurance programs.
 - ◆ **Expand the public health and primary care workforce.** Health reform legislation must significantly increase support and funding for programs that provide loan repayments, scholarships and other grants for the training of public health personnel, primary care physicians, nurses and other health providers. It must also improve the distribution and diversity of health professionals in medically underserved communities, as well as ensure there is a capable health workforce able to provide care for all Americans and respond to the growing demands of our aging and increasingly diverse population.