



National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems

SAFETY NET HOSPITALS

An Essential Resource for Effective Health Care Reform

If the question of universal health care is not "if" we get there but "how," America needs the know-how of those who have been providing it for decades—safety net hospitals.

No other sector of the nation's health industry can match the experience of safety net hospitals and their integrated health systems in assuring health care access for all Americans.



We ensure health care access.

Safety net hospitals serve generations from all walks of life—women, children, seniors, the uninsured, the under-insured and anyone who needs neonatal care, burn or trauma treatment. Safety net hospitals understand the health needs of their communities and are leaders in providing access to the full spectrum of care, from family medicine to high-tech specialty and emergency response care. For universal coverage to be effective, quality care must be available to everyone—something safety net health systems have been ensuring for years.

We meet unique patient needs.

With universal health care, the diverse and socially complex patients that safety net hospitals see every day will become integrated into the health care system. But the cost of such integration could prove to be significant. Worse still, many patients will simply continue to fall through the gaps if there is no support to help them navigate

a complicated health care system. That's where safety net hospitals can help.

- Safety net hospitals anticipate the needs of patients from all socioeconomic classes, races, and ethnic backgrounds—by providing social services, culturally sensitive care, language services and transportation services. By doing so, overall health care costs decline.
- Safety net hospitals operate integrated health care systems that provide primary care, mental health and dental care through community-based facilities that are outside the hospital. In fact, safety net hospitals deliver over 35 million non-emergency outpatient visits each year—giving the safety net a unique perspective on what it takes to provide the best possible care to diverse patients in an open access system.

We bridge gaps in the health care system.

Universal coverage alone will not solve the health care system's problems or meet all of the health challenges of individuals across the country. Every day, safety net hospitals attend to the gaps that exist in health insurance and the needs of individuals caught in them. Right now, safety net hospitals and their community clinics are:

- Ensuring that under-insured patients with out-of-reach deductibles have access to health care.
- Ensuring that patients eligible for coverage programs—but not yet enrolled—get the care they need.





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- Ensuring that patients between jobs and employer sponsored coverage still receive the care they need for their families.
- Ensuring that patients who have private insurance—but lack coverage for key things like dental care and mental health services—are cared for in a timely manner.



We invest in healthy communities.

The health status of many Americans will not automatically improve with health insurance, especially at-risk populations and communities with high rates of chronic disease. Safety net hospitals have developed effective care management programs to control conditions such as obesity, asthma and hypertension. Safety net health systems have developed care registries to track diabetic patient conditions and assigned care managers to monitor HIV/AIDS patients. In short, safety net hospitals have already piloted new models of care to expand access, lower costs and improve quality—these are the kind of programs that health reform will need to be effective and economically viable.

America's safety net hospitals and health systems also wrote the book on how to develop, teach and implement medical best practices that improve patient outcomes and safely reduce the cost of care. Over 100 safety net hospitals train more than 15,000 physicians and health care workers annually and remain at the forefront of establishing and sharing best practices with the medical community at large.



Safety net hospitals know health care is a valuable community resource and that essential services such as neonatal units, burn centers, trauma units and emergency preparedness programs need to be there regardless of their short-term profitability. The value safety net hospitals provide to all cannot be overlooked in a quest to lower costs. With the looming threats of pandemic flu and the possibility of bioterrorism, true health care reform must not overlook the safety net that always needs to be there.

We are here to help.

Safety net hospitals have worked to improve and reform health care for decades—treating the hardest to reach patients that the health care system has sidelined. As the nation works toward real health care reform, the experience and expertise of safety net hospitals will enhance the dialogue.

Count on America's great safety net hospitals and health systems to provide a real world perspective on how to create a system that is effective, efficient, and responsive to patients. Call on safety net hospitals—we will always be there to help. ■

For more information about the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems, visit our Web site at www.NAPH.org.