

Health Care Reform

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union represents 1.3 million workers in North America, primarily in the grocery, retail, and meatpacking industries.

In the final Presidential debate, President-elect Obama asserted that health care is a right and not merely a personal responsibility. The UFCW agrees. We have been at the forefront of the fight for better health care at the negotiating table, in state governments, and in the halls of Congress. Health care was at the heart of the largest and most important work stoppage in the last decade. That 2003-2004 work stoppage in Southern California lasted for 141 days and involved more than 70,000 UFCW members. UFCW members know first hand that we are facing a national crisis in health care coverage and that we need a national solution now.

That was a prime motivator for the UFCW joining as a leading member of the Health Care for America Now! (HCAN) coalition. The UFCW strongly supports the principles enunciated by Health Care for America Now!

In addition, in 2005 UFCW International President Joe Hansen was appointed as a member of the congressionally created Citizens Health Care Working Group (CHCWG). He spent almost two years with members of the CHCWG who represented corporations, health care professionals, and community groups in hearings, listening sessions with the public, accepting public comments, meeting with experts and advocates, and polling the public on various proposals. The CHCWG principals? quality health care should be affordable and accessible for all people, regardless of how much money they make or where they live; a streamlined, a cost-effective system that guarantees that quality health care to everyone is affordable; meaningful health care reform must address cost, quality, and access; health care must be patient-driven, not consumer-driven; health care must be a right, not a privilege? were shared with both Congress and the Bush administration, and are certainly worth consideration in any broad-based health care reform.

While we are well aware of past attempts to enact national health care reform, we know the importance of the issue and are prepared to engage with the Obama-Biden administration in an effort to provide quality, affordable health care to every American.

The UFCW sees the need for a strong federal role in transforming our health care delivery system to a new platform that changes the priority to wellness and preventive care services as well as management of chronic diseases, that is, the promotion of integrated health management programs. The federal government should promote change in provider payment systems from episodic care to one that is linked to quality and positive outcomes? a key element in this transformation includes provider performance transparency.

Outlined below are the HCAN! principles, which we believe provide a useful beginning framework for the legislative effort that the 111th Congress and the Obama-Biden administration must lead. The UFCW looks forward to joining as a partner in this historic effort.



Our government's responsibility is to guarantee quality, affordable health care for everyone in America and it must play a central role in regulating, financing, and providing health coverage by establishing:

- A truly inclusive and accessible health care system in which no one is left out.
- A choice of a private insurance plan, including keeping the insurance you have if you like it, or a public insurance plan without a private insurer middleman that guarantees affordable coverage.
- A standard for health benefits that covers what people need to keep healthy and to be treated when they are ill. Health care benefits should cover all necessary care including preventative services and treatment needed by those with serious and chronic diseases and conditions.
- Health care coverage with out-of-pocket costs including premiums, co-pays, and deductibles that are based on a family's ability to pay for health care and without limits on payments for covered services.
- Equity in health care access, treatment, research, and resources to eliminate racial disparities in health outcomes and real improvement in health and life expectancy for all.
- Health coverage through the largest possible pools in order to achieve affordable, quality coverage for the entire population and to share risk fairly.
- A watchdog role on all plans, to assure that risk is fairly spread among all health care payers and that insurers do not turn people away, raise rates, or drop coverage based on a person's health history or wrongly delay or deny care.
- A choice of doctors, health providers, and public and private plans, without gaps in coverage or access and a delivery system that meets the needs of at-risk populations.
- Affordable and predictable health costs to businesses and employers. To the extent that employers contribute to the cost of health coverage, those payments should be related to employee wages rather than on a per-employee basis.
- Effective cost controls that promote quality, lower administrative costs and long-term financial sustainability, including: standard claims forms, secure electronic medical records, using the public's purchasing power to instill greater reliance on evidence-based protocols and lower drug and device prices, better management and treatment of chronic diseases, and a public role in deciding where money is invested in health care.