



Health Care Priorities for New Administration and Congress

PICO is a national community organizing network of 53 faith-based organizations working in 17 states. PICO has a long track record of developing innovative policy solutions in the area of health care, including: the groundbreaking passage of the Children's Health Initiative in Santa Clara County, CA that guaranteed all children access to health coverage and that spawned a statewide movement for children's health; and state campaigns to expand coverage in California, Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, Missouri and Vermont. At the national level, PICO has also played an important role in fighting cuts to the Medicaid program and helping to lead the broad-based effort to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program in 2007.

Our health care priorities for the New Administration and Congress include:

1. Making temporary increase in the federal share of the Medicaid program (FMAP) part of the stimulus to avert deep cuts in public health insurance.

States are facing increasingly dire budget problems. Ten million people could lose their private health coverage if unemployment reaches 10 percent. A temporary increase in the federal share of the Medicaid program (FMAP) is an approach that has been used in the past to help cushion the impact of economic crises on state budgets. It would also help sustain state health reform momentum, which has been an important ingredient in driving the national debate forward.

2. Passing SCHIP quickly in order to provide needed relief to families and states and build bi-partisan momentum for true health reform.

Quickly passing a 4 year reauthorization of SCHIP will provide economic assistance to families and states and demonstrate bi-partisan momentum for broader reform. In addition to the good policies in SCHIP Reauthorization that will help reach low-income uninsured children, states need the security of a longer reauthorization to sustain and expand their programs. The SCHIP program expires on March 31, 2009.

3. Working with House and Senate Committees that have jurisdiction over health policy to develop a single legislative vehicle that can serve as a rallying point for comprehensive health reform.

As Congressional leaders work out differences over substance and process of health reform, we believe that a high priority needs to be placed on reaching agreement on a single legislative vehicle that can become a rallying point for building public support for reform.

4. Main policy priorities for health reform are broad: (1) covering everyone; (2) affordable to families; (3) fiscal sustainability and (4) protecting low-income families and children.

PICO's main focus is making sure that health reform succeeds. We believe that the faith community can play an important role in making the moral case that everyone deserves to be at the "health care table of plenty;" that our in-depth relationship with families struggling to afford health coverage can help define what true affordability means; and that the faith community has a strong interest in making sure that the needs of low-income children and families are advanced by health reform, including an emphasis on prevention, and strengthening the community primary health care system.

5. Support a broad faith-based movement for comprehensive health reform

PICO has worked closely with a broad set of religious denominations and organizations at the national level to hammer out a common strategy on health reform. We are also helping to build state-based faith coalitions in targeted states and districts, and planning a large-scale faith event on health care on Capitol Hill March 9-11. The Administration and Congress can help support these efforts by participating in local, state and national faith events and summits designed to build organized support for health reform.