



Health Matters –E-Newsletter *Happy Holidays* Edition

December 11, 2008

1. National Health Reform is Coming...

- Sign-on Letter to Utah's Congressional Delegation: sign **by December 18th**
- Give Input to Obama Administration on Reform! (**Dec 23rd** Town Hall (6 sites) w/AUCH)

2. Emergency Medicaid Strategy Meeting **Jan 8th** regarding 15% budget cut directive

3. Jeanne Lambrew to head CMS (Federal agency that administers Medicaid & Medicare)

4. State Health Reform: Final Meeting of the Task Force is **Dec 16th**

5. Call for Stories related to...

- **Declining Ambulance Rides because of Being Uninsured**
- **Lost Health Care Coverage Because Of the Economic Downturn**

6. UHPP is moving to a NEW location!

1. National Health Reform is Coming...

A. Sign-On Letter/Call for Endorsers: *Voice the Need for National Health Reform*

Join us in urging our Congressional Delegation and President-Elect Obama to make health system reform their top domestic priority in 2009.

Previous reform efforts on the national level have fallen flat on their face. But this time around our current system cannot be our second best choice. In Utah alone, 388,000 are uninsured. We rank 10th in nation for highest number of uninsured children, and health care costs are far outpacing increases in income. All Utahns and all Americans need to band together and commit to addressing the health care crisis.

As a national model in terms of quality and value of its health care, Utah will be instrumental in the debate. And we need to ensure our Utah values are reflected on the national front—private market based, bi-partisan, and financially sustainable. **Help give Utah a voice by signing on as an organization or as an individual to the letter below and voice your support for national health reform. To sign-on, send us your name, organization's name, mailing address and email by Friday Dec. 18th.**

Dear Utah Congressional Delegation and President-elect Obama,

As you no doubt heard directly from voters during the election season, families across Utah are increasingly anxious about health care and are eager to see the new Administration and Congress keep their pledge to enact reforms that will ensure that every American has access affordable and stable health insurance coverage and high-quality health care.

With rising premiums far out-pacing wages, everyone is feeling the effects. Family premiums for health coverage have increased 30 percent since 2001, while income has increased just three percent. Businesses that offer health insurance see it in their bottom lines, and family budgets are being strained by rising out-of-pocket costs. For the small businesses that can't offer coverage and individuals who do not have coverage, the possibilities of obtaining coverage grow ever dimmer.

The recent downturn in the economy has compounded these problems. Chief among people's economic worries are the health and well being of their families. They fear not being able to take their child to the doctor or get the medications they need to stay healthy and take care of their loved ones.

Fixing the economy and reforming our health care system must be inextricably linked. Polling data collected prior to the election asked likely voters to rank policy ideas based on how effective they would be at improving the current economic situation, and the top two answers were reducing health care costs and providing health care to all Americans.

As we move into a new presidential administration and Congress, our leaders must work together to find common-ground policies to provide coverage to all Americans.

We therefore, urge President-elect Obama to make comprehensive health reform the top domestic priority in his administration and the one that he tackles first. Utah's children, businesses, seniors, people with disabilities and families are counting on action and his leadership.

Sincerely,

[List of PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS]

FINAL DEADLINE TO SIGN ON IS DECEMBER 18TH

To sign on send email to jessica@healthpolicyproject.org For questions, call (801) 433-2299.

B. Statewide (6 sites) Discussion on National Reform: Give input to incoming Obama administration, a collaboration with AUCH

When: December 23rd 4:00-6:00 PM

Where: Salt Lake City (2 sites), Logan, Ogden, Provo, and St. George

RSVP is a must: Send email to jessica@healthpolicyproject.org or call (801) 433-2299

In response to President-Elect Obama's and HHS Secretary Daschle's request for nationwide grassroots input on national health reform, the Utah Health Policy Project and Association for Utah Community Health will host town hall discussions on national health reform in 6 sites around Utah.

SPACE IS LIMITED/1ST COME, 1ST SERVED.

Major areas to discuss include:

- General: Input on the general outline and key elements of the Obama/Daschle plan for reform. We will send participants this information prior to the meeting.
- Role of States: What should be the role of states in designing and implementing reforms? How much flexibility should Utah and other states have in designing their reforms?
- Cost: How should we pay for reforms? What resources and tools should the Federal government provide to help states better manage costs?
- Role of Employers vs. individuals: should health care still be employer-based or should we shift to individual responsibility? Should employers be required to contribute toward the premium?
- Access to Primary and Preventive Care, "The Role of the Health Care Home": Utah does not have enough primary care providers or primary care access points. What should national reforms do to address this growing problem?
- Wellness & Chronic Disease Management: What should the government's (Federal or state) role be in promoting wellness and managing chronic illnesses?
- User-Friendly Health Plans: how should health insurance or coverage plans be designed so that people can take charge of their health.
- Medicaid and CHIP: What should public programs look like in the reforms? What role should they play in the broader reforms?
- Other discussion topics are welcome. Please submit with RSVP.

2. **Emergency Medicaid Strategy Meeting Jan 8th regarding 15% budget cut directive**

When: January 8th 12:30-2:00 pm

Where: Association for Utah Community Health

The Governor's recently proposed budget recommendations protected important health care programs for Utah's low income families. BUT, our work is not done. The Utah Legislature appears to be very reluctant to adopt critical measures such as dipping into the state's rainy day fund or bonding for state construction projects. The Legislature has asked all departments, including the Departments of Health and Human Services, to prepare recommendations for 15% in additional cuts. This means that once again cuts to Medicaid and CHIP are on the table. A cut of this magnitude will threaten Medicaid eligibility level for people with disabilities/aged/blind living with income between 75-100% of poverty level. Also vulnerable are critical services such as prosthetics or home and community based services and the Medicaid Breast and Cervical Treatment and Prevention Program.

Fortunately there are options. Utah has not implemented many cost saving mechanisms within our Medicaid program such as prior authorization in our preferred drug list. Further, there are new revenue sources that could help Utah maintain its Medicaid program like the temporary increase in the Federal Match Rate and a tobacco tax increase. Please join us to help strategize the best way to help Utah legislators understand *all* the options available to minimize harm to our Medicaid program and keep CHIP fully funded. At this meeting we will build on our emergency Medicaid strategy session of last week.

For questions, email lincoln@healthpolicyproject.org Or call (801) 433-2299.

3. **Jeanne Lambrew to head CMS, Federal agency that administers Medicaid/CHIP & Medicare**

Just today President-Elect Obama named Jeanne Lambrew, Ph.D., to head CMS. Dr. Lambrew (click [here](#) for full profile) brings a wealth of expertise and common sense to the challenges surrounding Medicaid, CHIP, and Medicare. She has been a familiar face and welcome presence at Families USA and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities conferences and will be a true ally for Utah advocates and policy analysts as we work to develop sound waiver policies that benefit all low-income Utah families. Under Lambrew's leadership, there will undoubtedly be fresh opportunities to replace Utah's Primary Care Network waiver with affordable, quality, comprehensive health care coverage for low-income working adults. President-Elect Obama also finalized his selection of Tom Daschle to head the Department of Health and Human Services *and* the new Office of Health Reform.

4. State Health Reform Front: Final Meeting of Task Force is December 16th

The year is coming to a close, but the Health Reform Task Force continues deliberation on health reform for Utah. The economic downturn has put serious constraints on the scope of what the Task Force will ultimately pass. Yet, there are a number of changes the state may see in the coming year. On Tuesday, December 16 from 8am to 12pm in the Capitol room 250, the Task Force will hold its final meeting for 2008. In addition to hearing testimony from a few groups, the Task Force will begin to review and discuss draft legislation for 2009 ([click here for the agenda](#)). The draft legislation has not yet been posted, but will at the very least be rolled out publicly at the meeting. For information on what the legislation may look like click [here](#) and then click on the Related Materials for the November 11 meeting. When the draft legislation is complete and ready for public consumption is should be posted under the Related Materials section for the December 16 meeting.

5. Call for Stories Related to Declining Ambulance Rides due to being Uninsured or Losing Coverage or Dropping Coverage due to Affordability because of the Economic Downturn (IMPORTANT!)

We're looking for anyone who may have declined to be transported to the hospital by ambulance against medical advice because they couldn't afford the trip — which typically costs about \$1,200! They may have chosen to drive themselves to the hospital, or decided to visit the family doctor later. From talking to paramedics, we know that many people can't afford the cost of an ambulance trip.

We also want to meet individuals who, due to the economic downturn, have either lost their coverage altogether or cannot afford the premium increases they must now pay.

If you have such stories or can introduce us to someone who does, please send Email to jessica@healthpolicyproject.org or call (801) 433-2299 and ask for Jessica or Stacey.

6. UHPP is moving to a NEW location!

UHPP has grown out of our current space and we are moving to a better location that will have ample space for coalition and Board meetings. Stay tuned for announcements about an Open House Party sometime in mid-January.

In the meantime, please change our address in your database or address book as follows:

UHPP's New Location:

508 E. South Temple, Suite 45

Salt Lake City, Utah 84102

On behalf of the UHPP team (staff and Board), we wish you all happy holiday time and good health and prosperity in the coming year!

You are receiving this email because you are on our Health Action mailing list. To subscribe or unsubscribe, email stacey@healthpolicyproject.org. We will always keep your email address confidential.



Internet services generously donated by Xmission