

White House Forum on Health Reform Washington, DC

March 5, 2009

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"...there is no debate about whether all Americans should have quality, affordable health care—the only question is, how? The **purpose of this forum** is to start answering that question— to **determine how we lower costs for everyone, improve quality for everyone, and expand coverage** to all Americans." President Barak Obama



The White House Forum on Health Reform

President Obama brought together leaders with diverse views at the White House Forum on Health Reform. The White House issued a report highlighting the productive discussions from the event.

Executive Summary

Participants generally agreed that **cost and access are the two primary areas that need to be prioritized in reform efforts.**

Many participants discussed the need to make sure health care costs reflect their value and the need to **avoid spending health care dollars on ineffective treatments or treatments with equally effective and less expensive alternatives.**

Several of the participants suggested that **policies promoting prevention and wellness should be an integral part of reforming the American health system.** Participants believed that these interventions would promote better health, improve quality of care, and help control growing costs.

There was consensus that there needs to be a **clear focus on prevention and keeping people healthy.** Several participants noted that an overwhelming majority of health care dollars are spent providing care to a small number of people; **investing in prevention and chronic disease management can lower health care costs.**

Many participants stressed the need to **emphasize public health and prevention over disease treatment.**

Representatives Roybal-Allard and Ross noted that **it is cheaper to prevent a disease than to treat it** and highlighted the need to **make public health and prevention a priority**.

Issue: Why is Health Reform Important, and How and When Should It Be Addressed?

Senator Dorgan observed that “the **model of our system is basically sick care, not health care** ... it seems to me that it is much more expensive than investing to help prevent people from getting sick.”

Ken Powell of General Mills and the Business Roundtable highlighted **wellness programs that focus on managing and preventing chronic illnesses** like asthma, back problems, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes through anti-smoking, exercise, and nutrition. He strongly advocated **businesses helping their employees be healthier** and made the point that these programs meaningfully **reduce health care costs for employers and improve the vitality of employees**.

Scott Serota of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and Janet Murguia of the National Council of La Raza also noted the **importance of public health and prevention**.

Cecile Richards of Planned Parenthood said the best estimate is that **for every dollar spent on prevention, four dollars are saved in avoided costs in the future**.

John Podesta of the Center for American Progress noted that the **growth of health care as a percent of the economy is unsustainable** for businesses and families and inhibits sustainable economic growth.

Issue: How Can We Contain Rising Health Care Costs?

Senator Mikulski suggested that the **best way to reform the system**, including controlling costs, **is to change the paradigm**. **Prevention**, quality, Health Information Technology, case management, and integrative care all can contribute to a more affordable system. She also noted that reducing administration costs, medical errors, and unnecessary duplicative tests would achieve system savings.

Issue: How Can We Expand Health Insurance and Improve Its Quality?

Numerous participants discussed **prevention and public health**.

Representative Roybal-Allard noted that **if our goal is a healthy society, we need to look at public health and prevention**. She emphasized that **we need to move from our disease-based focus to one that strives to keep people healthy** at the outset.

Bill Novelli stressed that **we need “big thinking” on prevention** and that **any reform effort will only be a patch if we do not figure out how to emphasize prevention more**.

He suggested that we need an improved messaging strategy to emphasize prevention.

Richard Kirsch of HCAN noted that in order to meet Americans' needs, **a reformed health care system will need a focus on primary care and prevention.**

Dr. Mohammad Akhter of the National Medical Association emphasized that **we need to have public health and prevention everywhere: in schools, churches, unions, and throughout communities.**

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