

Local leaders offer suggestions on health care reform

At a recent Health Care Forum, President Obama said, "In this effort, every voice has to be heard. Every idea must be considered. Every option must be on the table."

In that spirit, the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County asked local community members for their perspectives on the essential elements of health care reform.

A core element must be extracting health insurance from employee benefit packages. This link is a remnant of World War II-era wage controls, when companies could only compete for talent by offering such benefits. It may have been practical then, but employee-benefit health insurance has become an anachronism. The unintended consequences — runaway costs, inequities, and economic inefficiencies — can only be stopped by decoupling health care from jobs. Revenue mechanisms will be needed to fund this transition without penalizing businesses; new health taxes and fees must not be

greater than current premiums (and eventually should decrease).

BILL TYSELING,
Executive Director,
Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce

Health reform must address three major gaps: improving health information technology (to improve quality and decrease costs); addressing inequities in health care access, quality, and the fundamental determinants of health (such as education, income, housing, environment, transportation); and not investing enough in prevention (as opposed to the current emphasis toward treating people after they have become sick or injured). If we make progress on all these fronts, we'll have a better chance of succeeding in our shared goal of a healthier America for all.

POKI NAMKUNG,
MD, MPH,
Santa Cruz County Health Officer

We deserve a health care

system that guarantees access to care for all, regardless of pre-existing conditions, employment status, age or disability. Care needs to be affordable and provided according to the standards of good preventative, curative and rehabilitative medicine. This can be accomplished by reducing administrative costs, redirecting health dollars from the for-profit pockets of the insurance industry and developing a coordinated single payer health care system that preserves choice of doctors and hospitals. In the past two years, the health care industry spent nearly \$1 billion to stop real reform. It's time to design a health economics that puts people first.

DEBORA BONE,
RN, PhD, Director,
Cabrillo College Stroke
and Acquired Disability Center

As an Emergency Room (ER) doctor, I see firsthand what happens when over 30,000 county residents are uninsured: they

go to the ER for medical care. Any realistic health care reform scenario will have to rely more on mid-level providers (e.g., nurse practitioners) due to the dearth of primary care physicians we're facing now. I'm skeptical about a government-run single payer system, partly because I've witnessed too much poor decision-making and inflexibility in our current system. I'd like to see patients and doctors join forces to regulate insurance companies' huge profits, so future doctors' careers are as satisfying as mine was.

STAN HAJDUK,
MD, ER Physician,
Watsonville Community Hospital

Whatever form health care reform takes, it should allow people to choose their health care providers. It also might provide new opportunities for those who take steps to improve their own health — such as quitting smoking, eating healthier diets, or exercising. These types of changes will

improve individuals' health in the short-term, while contributing to keeping costs down in the future.

JESS BROWN,
Executive Director,
Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau

Health care reform should deliver health care that is high quality and affordable, with universal coverage and simplicity replacing the overwhelming complexity and inefficiency of our current system. But in order for these types of reforms to succeed, people must have confidence that their future health care will be at least as good as what they have now. A belief in the individual benefits of health care reform is essential; without it, reform efforts will be vulnerable to those who want to maintain the current status quo by playing to people's fears, as they have in the past.

ELLEN PIRIE,
Second District Supervisor,
Board of Supervisors