

HEALTH CARE FOR MASSACHUSETTS CAMPAIGN

649 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 8 ♦ Cambridge, MA 02139 ♦ (617) 868-1280

Universal Health Care for Massachusetts: Amending the State's Constitution as the First Step

Health care crisis

Our system of health care delivery has shown remarkable adaptability. We have heard for years of the crises in health care but somehow the system survives and in many cases thrives. We have seen remarkable achievements with the extension of health care to children, the disabled, and minority communities. But we have also tolerated an extraordinary level of inequality and inefficiency. We allow rationing of high quality health care services based on income. We spend nearly 40 percent of every health care dollar on administration, dollars that could better be spent providing direct care. We have failed to extend the marvelous innovations of health care to those who work part time, are unemployed, or those whose jobs do not include health insurance. We have failed to achieve full health value for the dollars we spend.

Amending the Massachusetts's Constitution to make health care a right

As an essential and necessary first step to resolving the health care crisis, we have presented an amendment to the constitution of the Commonwealth to ensure that no resident of the state lacks access to affordable health insurance coverage for medically necessary medical and mental health services including prescription drugs and devices.

We understand that changing the fundamental governing document of our state, the oldest such constitution in the world, is a decision of enormous importance. We have chosen to present this amendment to our fellow citizens because we believe there is no better way to begin the process that will bring health and financial security for all of us. Solving this crisis requires the simultaneous effective committed participation of all the varied elements of the health care system. The 71,000 registered voters from 343 cities and towns across the state that signed this ballot petition last fall are asking for this commitment.

We have modeled this amendment on the language of the original Constitution that included education as the responsibility of the state's government. Like education, health care should be available to all residents of the state.

We have not prescribed or proscribed any possible solution. Ratification will clearly and conclusively establish that ensuring access to health care for every resident, like education, is the fundamental responsibility of our elected government. Our goal is to use the convening authority of the government to achieve universal health care insurance coverage.

Where will the money come from to make coverage affordable for everyone?

By putting all the dollars we now spend for care for the uninsured - care that is often too little, too late and more expensive than it should be - into the early diagnosis and treatment of disease; from cutting administrative costs and investing them in direct care; from new revenues generated by the economic growth. Expanded access to health care will mean new jobs, higher incomes, a healthier and more productive workforce, more profitable businesses, and more research and innovation. There are numerous positive synergies between health and economic growth.

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Should Massachusetts embark on such profound reform on its own?

Waiting for a national solution has unacceptable human and economic costs. We are one of the wealthiest states in the nation and an historic leader in expanding health care access. Yet we are falling behind states like Maine and California that have acknowledged dire fiscal consequences of high uninsurance levels. Should we wait for consensus among states whose circumstances and commitment to change are so very different? The Commonwealth's health and competitiveness are on the line. We can solve the problem of unequal access to health care coverage and reap economic benefits from doing so.

Affordable health insurance coverage for all

We have crafted language that is unambiguous and direct. Our fellow state residents overwhelmingly support universal access to health care. With the support of the current Constitutional Convention, the voters will be able to endorse the amendment in 2006. With this commitment, our elected representatives will be empowered to lead Massachusetts to affordable health insurance coverage for all.

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