

# HEALTH CARE FOR MASSACHUSETTS CAMPAIGN

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Blue Cross Foundation Study Shows More Than Ever Why Guaranteed Access to Health Care is Overdue in Massachusetts

**November 16, 2004 (Boston, MA)**—The Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign (HCMC) today released the following statement in response to the announcement from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation concerning the uninsured.

“The release of the study today about the uninsured is further proof that we in Massachusetts must find a way to guarantee access to quality health care for all of our residents,” said Barbara Roop, the co-chair of the HCMC.

“Today's report is very important in shaping the debate since it tells us what we already spend and who pays for the care of the uninsured. It is a first step to ending the myth that care for the uninsured is “free.” There's a high price to be paid not only by the uninsured themselves, but by everyone patient, provider, employer and taxpayer in the Commonwealth. The study also is a valuable tool in identifying available resources that can, with reform, be spent to expand access and provide better, more cost-effective care to the uninsured and underinsured,” Roop added.

“We applaud the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation's plan to take the further step of putting concrete reform options on the table this spring as well as the efforts of the many advocates who have already put proposals on the table or are developing them for the next legislative session. Their proposals will be invaluable to solving the challenge of ensuring affordable and sustainable access for all which requires linking expansion to cost containment and quality improvement initiatives system wide,” said Roop.

“While the potential costs may seem daunting, they must be compared with the costs of inaction – \$4 billion in health care spending hikes this year alone – and the billions of dollars in potential savings from quality improvement and administrative streamlining that can be used to expand coverage. Inaction increases the burden on patients and their families, increases the burden on employers and their workers, increases the burden on taxpayers, and increases the drag on our economy without significantly expanding access to the hundreds of thousands of uninsured and underinsured, “ she added. “Reform promises better care and more affordable care for everyone.”

“Reform efforts are moving on two parallel and complementary tracks – establishing the principle that everyone should have access to needed care

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through a constitutional amendment and designing specific policies to reach that goal. Both are essential to making our health care system work for patients, providers, employers and taxpayers,” Roop said.

The Constitutional Amendment which won a preliminary legislative victory last July would require the state to make sure every Massachusetts resident can get affordable coverage for medically necessary health and mental health care services including prescription drugs and devices. As a ballot petition, sent to the Legislature by 71,385 registered voters, it needed only 50 legislators to vote “yes” to move on to the next step – a “yes” vote in the 2005-2006 Constitutional Convention. Over 150 legislators voted for the measure, giving it a strong send-off to the next vote in 2005-2006.

“The Amendment represents a commitment by the commonwealth to enact the necessary reforms to ensure every resident affordable access to medically necessary health and mental health care including prescription drugs and devices. It is the principle that will spur concrete action,” Roop said.

“For those with insurance, our Amendment will make sure they will still be able to afford insurance one year or 20 years from now. For the uninsured, the focus of the Blue Cross Foundation study, this Amendment builds on the existing momentum for reform and guarantees that the access needs of the uninsured will be met through reforms to make the health care system work better for everyone,” she added.

“The Amendment has already sparked the debate for reforms to guarantee every Massachusetts resident access to high quality, cost-effective care when they need it and to end the cost shifting responsible for the skyrocketing premiums that are rapidly pricing middle income, working families and small and medium sized employers out of the insurance market,” Roop added.

The Constitutional Amendment requires elected officials to reform, with stakeholder input, our health care system to ensure access to affordable health insurance for all residents – the key to getting the high quality care that will over time reduce costs. Reputable studies show these reforms can be paid for by redirecting money already spent on care for the uninsured and cutting clinical and administrative waste. These changes will mean getting better value for our health care dollar by using the dollars we currently spend for direct investments in the health and welfare of all Massachusetts residents and in the vitality of our health care economy.

Supporters of the measure point to several reasons why its passage is necessary, including:

- Skyrocketing premiums that are rapidly making health coverage unaffordable for middle-income families and for small and medium-sized employers which, in turn, threatens the financial stability of Massachusetts families and of the health care system which accounts for almost 25% of our economy.

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- Rapidly growing uninsurance rates that threaten the health and financial well-being of Massachusetts families and fuel huge disparities in health outcomes in communities of color.
- The failure to develop a legislative approach to universal coverage after over a decade of debate.

“Action is needed now to end the profound injustice of excluding huge numbers of our friends, neighbors and co-workers from access to the high quality care most of us take for granted, thereby condemning them to live sicker lives and die younger,” said Dr. John Goodson, co-chair of the HCMC. “This Blue Cross study reinforces the need for the Amendment. Our Amendment sends a strong signal to everyone who has a stake in designing a health care system that works for patients, providers, employers and taxpayers that we’re setting the table to begin the discussions that will lead to real reforms over the next few years,” Goodson added.

Business leaders, small business owners and health care providers have expressed support for the measure. Several small business owners testified at a legislative hearing earlier this spring or have submitted testimony to the legislative committee reviewing the proposal.

The text of the Amendment reads:

*Upon ratification of this amendment and thereafter, it shall be the obligation and duty of the Legislature and executive officials, on behalf of the Commonwealth, to enact and implement such laws, subject to approval by the voters at a state wide election, as will ensure that no Massachusetts resident lacks comprehensive, affordable, and equitably financed health insurance coverage for all medically necessary preventive, acute and chronic health care and mental health care services, prescription drugs and devices.*

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