

## Frequently Asked Questions

### I. Local government action

***Q: Why should local governments advocate for federal health care reform?***

**A:** For a number of reasons. First, we are elected officials who care deeply for the well-being of our constituents, and we are responsible for ensuring that local government serves to make their lives better. We know that many members of our communities are losing access to health care because they are being laid off and losing employer-provided health benefits. It's double jeopardy -- they are faced with losing both their income and their health care at the same time. The current economic climate is very difficult for the people we represent. If they had access to care even when they were unemployed, they could maintain their health and that would be better for them and better for the entire community.

Second, much of the public's health is a consequence of public health services – think about clean water, safe food, air no longer contaminated with tobacco smoke, and children protected from the killer communicable diseases of the past. These health changes are the result of population-based “health care,” something that occurs outside the doctor's office and the hospital. Public health programs are implemented on the local level, but we can't do it alone. The economic crisis has made it almost impossible for local governments to continue to provide necessary and appropriate public health services. We need federal health reform that protects and enhances our public health efforts so that the gains we've made can be maintained and so that we can continue to make advances that will improve everyone's health.

Third, any federal or state health reform plan that is put into place will be implemented on the local level. Counties and cities will play a key role in making sure the required changes are carried out appropriately. Given that local governments are on the health care “front line,” it is essential that we let state and federal lawmakers know what we need at the local level; and it is essential that we partner with federal and state lawmakers to ensure that we work together throughout this process of implementing reform. By being engaged in this way, local governments can ensure that national health reform serves our local communities.

### II. The Status Quo

***Q: Don't we have the best health care system in the world? Won't health care reform just add to costs without any improvements?***

**A:** We do have one of the best health systems in the world – for those who can afford it. The problem is that millions upon millions of people can't, and that number is growing. It's growing, in part, because there are no rational cost controls, no rational quality controls, and no rational administrative systems in our current health system. This situation is unsustainable. So even if we were comfortable with the rationing of care based upon price, which is what we have now, it won't work over the long term.

A system that only works for part of society is not a system that works. A truly functioning health care system provides everyone with access to high-quality, efficient care. If we craft reform correctly, it will improve the quality of care while also making it accessible to the millions who don't have it.

By not providing care to millions of people, we drive up costs through the inefficient use of emergency rooms, through the increase in preventable disease, and through incentives that encourage health providers to provide more medicine, not necessarily better medicine.

### **III. Financing**

***Q: How do you think federal health care reform should be paid for?***

**A:** That is a question for the federal government to determine.

However, if we leave the current system in place, health care costs will eventually eat up every penny of the federal budget. The current system is not sustainable. We must be fiscally prudent as we move forward, but we must pursue reform without delay. Budgetary concerns, especially the federal deficit, along with the state of our economy, and the growth of the uninsured, should strengthen our resolve to pursue health reform now.

***Q: Do you support a public insurance plan option?***

**A:** As officials representing over 60 percent of the population of Washington State, we are most concerned about everyone having access to affordable, high-quality, and comprehensive health care. We also want to make sure the system enables people to be as healthy as possible through health promotion and disease prevention services and programs.

As Board of Health members, we have chosen not to take a collective position on the financing mechanism used to achieve that result. We care first and foremost about enabling our constituents to be as healthy as possible. Our current system doesn't do that and so we need reform.