



King County and Health Reform

King County, as a large public, self-insured employer, coordinator of the health safety net and safety net service provider, co-founder of the Puget Sound Health Alliance, jail health provider, regional mental health service coordinator, and owner of Harborview Medical Center, strongly advocates for national health reform. We support health reform legislation based on the six guiding principles and fundamental priority elements stated below.

King County's Guiding Principles for National Health Reform

- 1. Access For All*
- 2. Quality Health Care*
- 3. Financially Sustainable*
- 4. Responsive to Patients and Communities*
- 5. Focus on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*
- 6. Focus on Achieving Health Equity*

Fundamental Priority Elements for Final Federal Legislation

1. Access For All

- *A public insurance plan, or other similar system, should be one option offered to individuals and groups.*
- *All individuals should have coverage and access to affordable, comprehensive health care services on an equitable basis, and at the right place and time. Care should not be limited or denied based upon ability to pay, pre-existing conditions, gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, immigration status, language, availability of transportation, neighborhood, or other factors. Costs to individuals should be based on an individual's ability to pay and preventive and wellness services should be at no direct cost to the patient.*

2. Quality Health Care

- *Comprehensive Health Benefits should emphasize Prevention*

A uniform set of benefits or services should be guaranteed and equally available to all individuals on the basis of clinical need. Medical, preventive, mental health, substance abuse, dental, vision, reproductive health and end of life care should be included. *Preventive care should be offered to individuals at no direct cost* and should be provided in adherence to guidelines developed by the US Preventive Services Task Force. Community resources to assure implementation of preventive services, such as outreach, health navigation, screening, educational and group activities should be funded.

- *Performance Measurement and Public Reporting*

Performance of the health system should be measured broadly with national standards and should move beyond measures of process quality, cost and patient experience to also include outcomes, functional status, efficiency and equity. Results from comparative effectiveness research should be used to determine best options for treatment coverage.

- ***Health Information Technology (IT) that is Interoperable and Supports Improved Patient Care Management***

Support for Health IT should be the standardization of clinical information, billing and reporting in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare data, and for public health monitoring of population health.

3. Financially Sustainable

- ***Payment Reform that Rewards Effective, Efficient, and Affordable Healthcare and Results in Fair and Equitable Payment Across the Nation***

Payment needs to be tightly aligned with value - quality, efficiency, and affordability. Administrative simplicity, new ways of paying providers, especially primary care, and the use of *accountable-care organizations* should be encouraged, like the *patient-centered medical home* and bundled payments for conditions, which may also support patients' care across the continuum as well as encourage patients to adhere to recommended treatments or behavior changes. Health reform proposals should address *unwarranted variation in care*, including the overuse, underuse, and misuse of care and *shared-decision making*. Funding the development and dissemination of research to practitioners and the public that compares the relative effectiveness of various treatments and technologies as well as treatment guidelines based on evidence is critical to reducing unwarranted variation in care.

4. Responsive to Patients and Communities

- ***Patient-Centered Care***

Health services delivery systems must be responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. Incentives and information must support and motivate patients to lead healthy lifestyles and partner with doctors or other practitioners to make informed decisions about safe, effective and efficient health care.

5. Focus on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

- ***Prevention and Public Health Investment Fund***

Health Reform must expand and sustain funding for population-based prevention and public health programs. This is so because our public health systems provide population-wide prevention and protection that is beyond the capacity of the medical care system or health insurers. Local Health Departments keep food safe, detect and stop outbreaks of disease, and help create conditions in the community which allow individuals to make healthier lifestyle decisions. Funding public health programs that address the links between public health, the built environment, mobility, and air quality should be a priority of health reform. The creation and sustained support of a "Prevention and Public Health Investment Fund" that supports local public health departments could meet this need.

- ***National Prevention and Wellness Strategy***

Health reform must include a national strategy to improve our nation's health through evidenced-based clinical and community-based prevention and wellness activities. Such a strategy would set specific goals in prevention and wellness activities, identify health disparities in prevention and wellness activities, and establish national priorities for prevention research.

6. Focus on Achieving Health Equity

Health reform must support funding for strategies, policies, and culturally appropriate interventions that assure health equity. Reform should also include adequate resources to strengthen race and ethnicity data collection efforts. For example, funding should be available to providers, employers, and health plans to collect information on race, ethnicity, primary language, and location of residence to enable the analysis of healthcare experience on a stratified basis and identify where inequities exist and should be addressed.