

**Prepared remarks of Karen Higgins, RN, co-president of National Nurses
United, on the Physician’s Proposal for Single-Payer Health Care
The National Press Club, May 5, 2016**

I am Karen Higgins, co-president of National Nurses United. With over 185,000 Registered Nurse members, NNU is the largest nurses’ organization in the United States.

NNU enthusiastically supports the PNHP proposal for “Moving Forward from the Affordable Care Act to a Single-Payer System.”

This updated approach to achieving guaranteed health care for all is an essential for the health of our country, and to provide the health security our patients desperately need.

Patients go without medications, or cut pills in half to make them last longer, are kicked out of the hospital when the insurance company says so, or cannot see the provider best suited to their condition because they are “out of network.”

We should always remember that “coverage” is not “care,” particularly in the present system of high deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs that create big barriers to access.

Nurses work on the front lines with doctors within our dysfunctional health care system, which is dominated by private insurers, drug companies and corporate hospital chains that put their bottom line ahead of patient needs.

Under the PNHP proposal, the health care system would be the opposite of an industry devoted to revenue. Instead, health care would be based on patient need and the professional clinical judgment of nurses, doctors and other providers.

Nurses understand that patients need choice – only single-payer, or as we often say, Improved Medicare for All, would enable patients to go to any provider or hospital.

A system that guarantees health care based on comprehensive benefits and choice of provider saves money (up to \$500 billion annually) and re-directs spending toward patient care and currently neglected health priorities, particularly public health.

Moreover, the “single payer” would have the power to negotiate lower prices for medications and other medical supplies, yielding additional savings and reining in costs.

The program would be paid for by combining current sources of government health spending into a single fund with modest new taxes that would be fully offset by reductions in premiums and out-of-pocket spending. Co-pays and deductibles would be eliminated.

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Public opinion consistently supports the expansion of Medicare to cover everyone.

For Registered Nurses, it is time to make our health care system reflect the values of caring, compassion and community. It's time for Single-Payer, Improved Medicare for All!

Karen Higgins, co-president of National Nurses United, is a staff nurse at Boston Medical Center and a past president of the Massachusetts Nurses Association. Over the course of nearly 20 years, Karen has served many leadership roles in the MNA, including board secretary and on its Cabinet for Labor Relations as both chair and vice chair. In addition, she was the co-chair of the MNA's Statewide Campaign for Safe Care, the chairperson of the MNA's Nursing Shortage Task Force, and a founding member of the Task Force on Workplace Violence. Her commitment to nursing and her leadership role in the creation of National Nurses United were key factors in the MNA members' endorsement of her position as one of three co-presidents of the new organization. National Nurses United is the largest U.S. union and professional association of nurses, with 185,000 members.