



29 East Madison Street, Suite 602
Chicago, Illinois 60602-4404
Telephone 312.782.6006
Fax 312.782.6006
info@pnhp.org www.pnhp.org

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Contact:

Quentin Young, M.D., (312) 782-6006,
info@pnhp.org
Don McCanne, M.D., don@mccanne.org
David Himmelstein, M.D.
Mark AlMBERG, (312) 782-6006,
cell: (312) 622-0996, mark@pnhp.org

Doctors, citing mandate for change, call on Obama, Congress to 'do the right thing' on health reform

15,000 physicians urge enactment of single-payer system

A group of over 15,000 U.S. physicians has called on President-elect Barack Obama and the new Congress to “do the right thing” and enact a single-payer national health insurance plan, a system of public health care financing frequently characterized as “an improved Medicare for all.”

“Our country is hailing the remarkable and historic victory of Barack Obama and the mandate for change the electorate has awarded him,” said Dr. Quentin Young, national coordinator of Physicians for a National Health Program.

“In large measure Sen. Obama’s victory and the victories of his allies in the House and Senate were propelled by mounting public worries about health care,” he said. “Yet the prescription offered during the campaign by the president-elect and most Democratic policy makers - a hybrid of private health insurance plans and government subsidies - will not resolve the problems of our dangerously dysfunctional system.

“We’ve seen such hybrids repeatedly fail in state-based experiments over the past 20 years in Oregon, Minnesota, Washington and several other states, including Massachusetts, whose second go-round at incremental reform is already faltering,” Young said.

“The only effective cure for our health care woes is to establish a single, publicly financed system, one that removes the inefficient, wasteful, for-profit private health insurance industry from the picture,” he said. “Single payer has a proven track record of success - Medicare being just one example - and is the only medically and fiscally responsible course of action to take.”

“A solid majority of physicians endorse such an approach,” Young said. “An April 2008 study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* shows 59 percent of U.S. physicians support national health insurance. Opinion polls show two-thirds of the public also supports such a remedy. Now, with strong political leadership, this reform is within reach.”

Young said the adoption of a single-payer health system can be a “major component of the new president’s economic rescue of Main Street.”

“We see no value in trying to bail out the private health insurance industry, an unsustainable system of financing care that has outlived its usefulness,” he said. “By contrast, a single-payer plan would provide direct and much-needed relief to millions of American households at a time of great economic hardship.”

“Only a single-payer system can achieve the goal of comprehensive and affordable care for all,” he said, noting that the estimated \$350 billion administrative savings realized by replacing private insurers would be enough to cover all of the country’s uninsured and to end co-payments and deductibles for all Americans. “This would be the perfect way for President Obama to get the country back on track.”

“Patients would be able to go to the doctors and hospitals of their choice and not have to worry about being able to afford it,” he said, “and the single-payer system’s ability to do bulk purchasing, planning and global budgeting would rein in costs.”

Young noted that Obama has said more than once that he is a supporter of a single-payer universal health care program, and that if he were “starting from scratch,” he would favor adopting one. In 2003, Young said, then Illinois state Sen. Obama remarked that “first we have to take back the White House, we have to take back the Senate, and we have to take back the House.”

Young remarked: “Tuesday’s election has made all of these conditions happen. In his first 100 days, President Obama has a window of opportunity to inspire the nation by championing the enactment of single-payer national health insurance under the slogan, ‘Everybody in, nobody out.’ Such a plan is embodied in the U.S. National Health Insurance Act, H.R. 676, introduced by Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) and co-sponsored by more than 90 others, more than any other health reform legislation.”

Young noted that at least five additional supporters of single-payer health reform were elected to Congress yesterday, including Senator-elect Tom Udall (D-N.M.), and that pro-single-payer ballot initiatives in 10 Massachusetts legislative districts “won by a landslide, on average receiving 73 percent of the vote.”

“Adopting a nationwide single-payer system will build on the great achievement of Medicare, further unify our people, strengthen our country’s economic competitiveness and assure President Obama’s legacy as an American hero,” Young said.

Physicians for a National Health Program, a membership organization of over 15,000 physicians, supports a single-payer national health insurance program. To contact a physician-spokesperson in your area, call (312) 782-6006 or visit www.pnhp.org/stateactions.