



**Consumers for
AFFORDABLE
Health Care
COALITION**

*Advocating the right to quality, affordable
health care for every man, woman and child*

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Public Comments Submitted by
Consumers for Affordable Health Care Coalition

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Public Hearing on the 2010-12 State Health Plan
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Consumers for Affordable Health Care

For over 20 years Consumers for Affordable Health Care has worked to protect the rights of health care consumers in Maine. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan, research and advocacy organization committed to helping all Maine people obtain quality, affordable health care. We represent a diverse, broad-based coalition of approximately 40 members, including individuals, faith-based groups, small businesses, and other advocacy organizations.

We applaud the Governor's Office for Health Policy and Finance for your efforts in creating such a comprehensive document outlining our state's goals. We also applaud your Office's foresight in preparing for the difficult task of implementing national health care reform at the state level. Maine is well-positioned to move forward quickly and become a model for other states. We commend you for your swift response and ask that you continue to maintain transparency throughout the process and engage consumers at every stage of decision-making.

First and foremost, we firmly believe that health care is a human right. Regardless of income, race, ethnicity, age, disability, residency, orientation, or gender, every person is entitled to receive comprehensive, coordinated, quality health care in a system that is transparent, efficient, and accountable to the people it serves. This mission should be the frame through which all decisions about public health, health care access, and delivery and payment systems are analyzed and developed. We support inclusion of such a statement in the State Health Plan.

The Plan highlights Maine's leadership in health reform and success in reducing the number of uninsured. We must not, however, rest on our laurels. While it is commendable that our health status has improved from 16th to 9th since 2003, we should still strive to be first in the nation. To help us get there, the Plan should recognize the correlation between health care coverage and health status; without health insurance, a person is more likely to delay or forego necessary care, and often need more expensive care later. Some Maine residents will die because they lack health insurance. The State Health Plan should include language that protects coverage gains that Maine has already achieved as we move forward through implementation. Maine should be ensuring that people who are currently covered are not placed at risk of losing coverage, especially coverage for critically important primary care and prevention that will help them stay healthy and help reduce the need for more expensive medical interventions in the future. Thus, we support the Plan's inclusion of the need to expand access to primary care and prevention.

We also support the goals of eliminating waste and inefficiencies in our health care system in order to help contain costs. Cost containment is critical to bringing down the skyrocketing costs

of premiums for private insurance so that those seeking health insurance in the individual market are able to afford quality coverage, especially those at moderate income levels.

The plan acknowledges that achieving many of its goals will require additional data. One example that bears emphasizing is that health disparities among various populations are largely undocumented in Maine. This is because the necessary racial and ethnic data, including language, are not currently being collected in a systematic way. In addition, the racial and ethnic categories that are used are not standardized, posing significant problems for determining accurate trends and/or needs. We strongly encourage including a goal to address this issue in the final version of the plan.

Another piece of the data issue also recognized by the plan and worth emphasizing is the need for greater transparency. As part of the continued effort towards more transparency the information currently provided to the public through various state and private websites needs to be more accessible, coordinated, and user-friendly.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that all Mainers have access to quality and affordable health care coverage so that we can achieve the healthiest Maine possible. In the short term, we look forward to working together to ensure further development of a robust State Health Plan to help lead us there.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We will be submitting additional detailed written comments for your review.