

Health Care Reform: Expanding Access

ANA believes that health care is a basic human right, and supports the World Health Organization’s challenge – originally articulated in 1978, and reaffirmed as late as 2007 – for all nations to provide a basic level of health care to their citizens. The U.S. is the only industrialized country that does not explicitly express a commitment to its people to take care of at least their basic health needs.

At a time when the number of people with inadequate or no health insurance is growing and health care and insurance costs are rapidly outpacing wages and inflation, a restructured health care system must ensure that all individuals and families have access to a standard package of essential health care services. This package would include primary and preventive care at affordable out-of-pocket costs.

The health care reform proposals currently under consideration in Congress would build upon our current system to strengthen and preserve the coverage many already enjoy while creating new access to affordable coverage for the millions who are currently left out.

ANA wants to expand access to health coverage through these provisions in health reform legislation:

- All individuals must have access to care that is timely, convenient and available in the community - in a word, accessible - to make expansion of health insurance coverage truly meaningful. Increasing accessibility could provide more opportunities for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) who run their own practice.
- With the growing shortage of physicians entering primary care, it is vital that Nurse Practitioners and Certified Nurse Midwives are recognized in health reform legislation as primary care providers, including as leaders of a “medical home” model. This will increase access by providing patients with more options for primary care services.
- To expand access, registered nurses must be able to practice to the full scope of their licensure. Registered nurses provide chronic disease management, coordination of care, prevention, health education, and wellness programs – services that are the foundation of health reform legislation.
- Access to care will not be a reality unless there is a sufficient workforce of registered nurses that is well-distributed geographically to provide care for the increasing number of people who will seek services once they have affordable health coverage.
- Current reform proposals recognize that access hinges on expanding the nursing workforce. Proposed investments in the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs would direct funding streams and financial commitments to nursing workforce and education, providing much-needed funding stability.
- Access must also include the availability of care in the patient’s community, with convenient hours to accommodate working families, waiting times that do not discourage patients from seeking care, and appropriate accommodations for vulnerable populations, such as home-based services. Nurses can help expand accessibility for primary care and services in alternative settings such as homes.

- Access to care must be affordable – reasonably priced in a variety of settings, with patient co-payments and other out-of-pocket costs based on the patient’s ability to pay so that cost is never a barrier to necessary care.
- Access to care must be acceptable to the patient, meaning services that are respectful of the patients’ culture and values and promote patient understanding and involvement in treatment decisions. Nurses’ holistic approach offers such recognition for the patient and his/her family and community.

About ANA’s Support for Universal Health Care

ANA’s House of Delegates, our representative policy-setting body democratically elected by our Constituent (state) Member Associations, voted to adopt a stance in support of guaranteed, affordable, high-quality health care for all.

ANA believes that health care is a basic human right, and supports the World Health Organization’s challenge – for all nations to provide a basic level of health care to their citizens.

ANA believes that a system focused on primary care, prevention and chronic disease management can alleviate much of the expensive acute care that currently takes its toll in human suffering, as well as dollars. It is a worthwhile national investment.

We also believe that nursing’s strengths as a profession -- providing holistic care that considers the individual, family and community -- matches the emphasis in current health reform proposals.

ANA’s health reform advocacy is guided by these principles, created by our membership. If proposed legislation did not match ANA’s goals for both nurses and patients, we would not be in support, regardless of the sponsoring political party.