

Health Care for All! Taking action.

a guide to organizing in your community

Our health care system needs work. Some say it is frayed, a patchwork quilt. Others say it is separate and unequal. Whatever your own views, you know that there are too many people in our country who do not have access to high quality, affordable, and timely health care.

What can be done? Many Americans want to see serious changes in how health care is delivered. But, they don't know where to begin, who to work with, and how to make real change happen. This guide will help you to do that.

Montgomery Health Care Action (MHCA) is a small grassroots health advocacy group in Montgomery

Who we are

County, Maryland. We began as the health care task force in a local church and grew into MHCA when task

force members invited others to join them in taking action on health care in our county and state. MHCA is partners with a statewide organization, Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative www.healthcareforall.com, which advocates for health care for all in our state.

About This Guide

This guide is a how-to toolkit for organizing in your community to make changes to the health care system. That sounds like a tall order, and it is! We are health care activists and we have done it. We know from our own work that grassroots organizing is the best way to achieve the kinds of reform that arise from people's experiences, hopes, and ideals. And, that it starts right at home where you live.

Your Potential Power

You and a small group of like-minded, concerned people in your community can make a difference. This guide will help you to:

- Form a task force
- Identify health care problems you want to address
- Set achievable goals
- Get an organization to support you
- Get others to join you
- Work with state and national health advocacy groups
- Influence your elected representatives
- Build momentum for change

Health Care is the Problem

More than 46 million people in our country are without health insurance. Millions more are under-insured. The US is the only industrialized country in the world that does not provide comprehensive health care to everyone. Yet we spend far more per capita than countries that do provide health care to everyone.

Health care has become more a privilege than a right. Those who can afford it, get it, although less and less. Even the middle class is feeling the squeeze in higher annual premiums and the loss of benefits. Some are just one pink slip away from being uninsured. The majority of the uninsured are working but, cannot afford job-based health insurance. Or, they find that insurance is not offered at work. Medicaid and other forms of medical assistance go only so far. A single mom working full time at minimum wage earns too much to qualify for Medicaid in most states.

Get Started: Form a Task Force

Do you know others who are aware of these problems? Who are angry or worried about our health care system? Ask a few people to join you in a task force to look into health care problems and take action. At first your task force can be an informal group of a few people in your neighborhood, at your workplace, from your kids' school, among your

friends, and at your church, synagogue or mosque.

Make a commitment to meet regularly, say once a month or so. Choose a convenient location and time. Share each other's e-mails and phone numbers. Pick a leader (or two) who would be willing to take on the duties of notifying the group of meetings, drawing up meeting agendas, and helping members to identify resources needed to do your work.

Identify the Problems in Your Community

Do you know how many people are uninsured where you live? Have you heard about individuals or families who have gone without needed health care? Do your legislators talk about solving problems with health insurance costs or increases in the uninsured? Are there clinics in your area that serve the uninsured?

There are many health care problems impacting local communities. Your task force can begin identifying them in your community if you:

- *Talk with your friends and neighbors*
- *Talk with your doctors at your next appointment*
- *Talk with health providers at community health centers,*

For more information on the problems with our health care system, go to Families USA www.familiesusa.org, Universal Health Care Action Network www.uhcan.org, Kaiser Family Foundation (and its Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured) www.kff.org, Commonwealth Fund www.cmwf.org, and Community Catalyst www.communitycatalyst.org

clinics, and emergency rooms

- Check out information at familiesusa.org and kff.org on your state's health issues
- Learn about medical assistance programs in your state (start with your state's website)
- Research medical assistance such as clinics and community health centers in your area
- Talk with minority and immigrant community groups about their health care needs
- Learn about which non-profit organizations, charities, and foundations support health care services or advocate for health care change
- Talk with clergy and ministries that provide health and social services for those in need
- Research your state's history of health care legislation
- Talk with your legislators and elected officials about unmet health care needs in your area

For example, Montgomery Health Care Action learned that more than 100,000 people in our county are uninsured and close to one million in our state don't have health insurance. As we talked with more people we learned about the clinic system that serves many of our uninsured county residents. We

met people who had heart-wrenching stories to tell us about being sick and going without care. Our task force discussed its findings and put them into a statement which helped us clarify our goals. We also put our findings and our goals into an eye-catching brochure so that we could easily share with people the problems we identified, our work to address them, and to ask them to join with us.

Set Goals, Take Action

How do you begin to take action? Whatever goals you choose will guide your work. You will be more effective if you enlist an organization to sponsor your task force and help you speak with a louder voice. Perhaps you want to begin by educating the community about the need for health care changes.

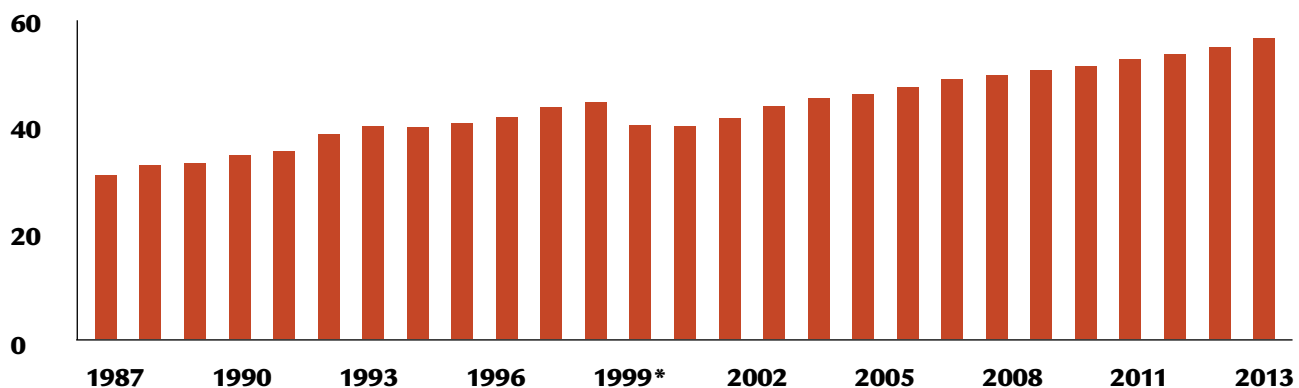
Here are some goals you can set for your task force:

1) Identify an organization to sponsor our work.

This could be a larger health advocacy group, a *labor union local* such as the Service Employees Interna-

46 Million People Uninsured in 2004; Projected to Increase Substantially

Millions Uninsured

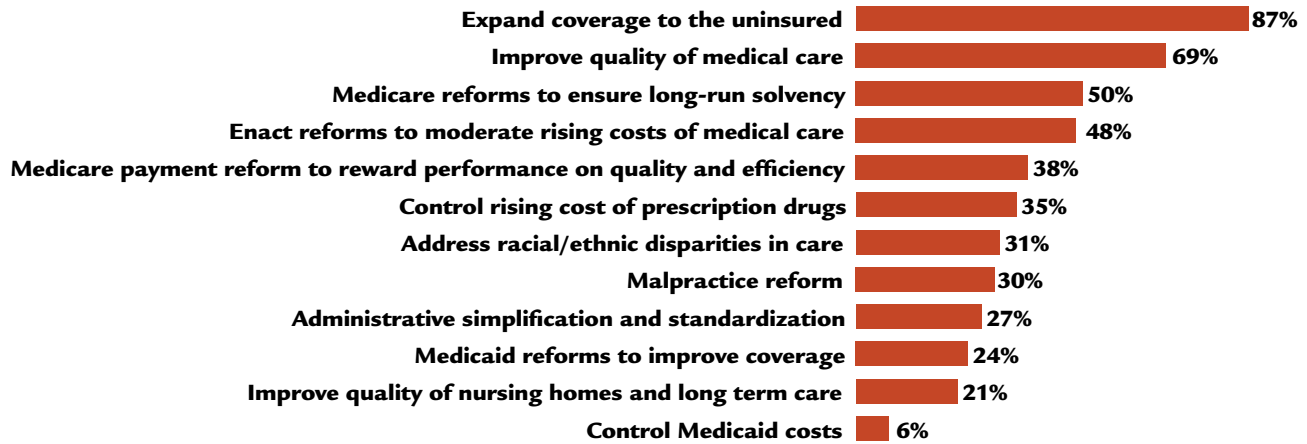


*1999-2003 estimates reflect the results of follow-up verification questions and implementation of Census 2000-based population controls.

Note: Projected estimates for 2005-2013 are for nonelderly uninsured based on T. Gilmer and R. Kronick, "It's the Premiums, Stupid: Projections of the Uninsured Through 2013," *Health Affairs Web Exclusive*, April 5, 2005. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *March CPS Surveys 1988 to 2005*.

Uninsured Top Priority for Congress According to Health Care Opinion Leaders

“Which of the following health care issues should be the top priorities for Congress to address in the next five years?”



Source: *The Commonwealth Fund Health Care Opinion Leaders Survey, November–December 2004.*

tional Union (SEIU), a *women’s organization* such as a local National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter or the League of Women’s Voters, a *faith-based organization*, or a *political party*. Check with Families USA or UHCAN (see box) to learn about groups in your area. Montgomery Health Care Action partnered with the statewide health advocacy organization, Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative. A sponsoring organization may be able to supply you with a meeting place, copying, phone, even printing, as well as materials and resources.

2) Document the health care problems in our community.

Your group may want to support with evidence the difficulties facing the uninsured in your area. You can create a short survey and *canvass people* in low income neighborhoods on a Saturday afternoon. You can hold small *focus groups* in a church or community health center. Recruit participants from the uninsured you have gotten to know while researching health problems in your area.

When you feel you have collected enough information, write up your findings in a “*Report to the*

Community.” Make it interesting and engaging. Tell moving personal stories but, change the names to protect your informants. At Montgomery Health Care Action a local film maker helped us make a short video that featured uninsured people in our community who faced health crises.

3) Educate the community.

Your “Report to the Community” can be used in a variety of ways. Take excerpts from the report and write a newsworthy *press release* (see the Appendix for an example). Send the press release to your local newspapers and media outlets. Send *copies of the “Report”* with a cover letter to your town and county council members, state legislative representatives, and other elected officials such as mayors or your governor. Write short articles for the *newsletters and bulletins* of the organizations you know are concerned about health care (see the Appendix for an example).

Use the “Report to the Community” as the centerpiece for *community forums* (see the Appendix). Holding these forums is an effective way to educate members of your community and to create mo-

mentum for change. Your speakers might include a member of your task force, a well-known community leader, a health care provider, an uninsured person with a story to tell, other health care activists, clergy, and elected officials. All of these efforts to educate the community will also enable your task force to gain visibility, thereby creating more opportunities for successful advocacy.

4) Identify solutions to the health care crisis.

Become familiar with efforts to address health care problems. Some solutions are limited and local. Others are statewide or even nationwide. Some are *stop-gap, emergency measures* such as increased funding for childhood immunizations or preventing Medicaid cuts. Others are *sweeping and long-term changes* such as a state moving to cover all its uninsured, or a national health program for everyone in the country.

Determine where your group can be most effective. Remember, though, that stop-gap measures are just that. They are important right now but, the only real, lasting solution to the health care crisis in our country and our communities is comprehensive health care for all. Check out statewide programs such as Maine's Dirigo health plan now underway to cover all Maine residents www.dirigohealth.maine.gov or www.healthpolicy.maine.gov and Maryland's proposed comprehensive health care plan www.healthcareforall.org.

5) Grow Our Task Force and Supporters.

As your advocacy work increases, you will want to *increase the membership* of your task force. If possible, recruit new task force members who can help *diversify* your membership. Invite new members from minority and immigrant groups, disability rights organizations, and among health care providers, clergy, community activists, and others. Invite people with different skill sets useful to your work,

such as individuals with writing and editing skills, public relations, policymaking, public speaking, or graphic design.

You will also want to gain broader support for the work you are doing so that it has ripple effects in your community. Form an *advisory board* and ask members of your town or county council who have sponsored health legislation to join. Ask members of the clergy who have spoken out on health care and the underserved. Your advisory board should represent the diversity of your community and, hopefully, its members should be outspoken on health care. Make it clear that members will be expected to *speak out* on health care problems and proposed solutions. They will also be asked to go after the *support of community organizations* and to support the work of your task force. Share this how-to guide with them and give them copies to share with others.

Remember, successful grassroots advocacy begins by working with those who are already sympathetic to your issue. As you grow, seek out new people and new organizations to work with you.

6) Reach Out to Other Organizations.

Increase the impact of your work by getting other community organizations to join with you. These can be a wide range of groups, including **non-profits, small businesses, faith-based organizations, health and social service providers, political action groups, civic associations,** and even **individuals.**

Create a *“Traveling Road Show”* to convince them to join with you. This could be a few members of your task force and advisory board who are willing to speak about the health care problems in your area and in your state. Make the “Road Show” interesting, not just a sad litany of facts. Do a piece of political theater, show clips of a movie such as “John Q” with Denzel Washington, Montgomery Health

Care Action's video on the uninsured, or bring along an inspirational speaker.

Urge each organization to sign a **Resolution for Organizations** (see the Appendix for an example) and agree to lend their name to your work. The more organizations and individuals you can count among your supporters, the greater your impact. Keep recruiting more organizations and individuals to work with you as you continue to move forward.

7) Influence Policymakers and Elected Representatives.

First, you need to *know who your elected representatives are* and which ones you want to influence. For example, if you are trying to pass a city, town, or county council resolution on health care for the uninsured, you must know your council members and mayor (Google your city, town, or county and state). If you want to influence your state legislature or government officials, get to know who they are and the health programs, legislation, policy initiatives they have supported and opposed (Google your state's official website, go to the website of the National Governors Association, www.ncsl.org, or one of the national health group websites

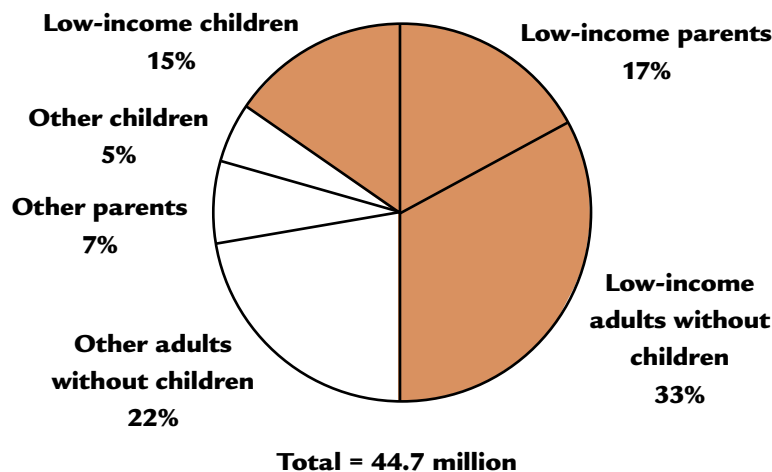
mentioned earlier such as

www.familiesusa.org, www.kff.org, www.uhcan.org. Do your homework. Learn which districts your elected officials represent, the committees they serve on, what their policy interests are, who in your state and community support them or oppose them, and get to know them in person (as well as their staff members who will be your contact points).

Second, *develop an effective message* to take to your representatives. Be clear on what your organization and its members support and why, your hoped-for solution to a health care problem, who it will help, and what it will cost. Prepare talking points before meeting with your elected officials and take copies with you to leave there. Make your talking points concise, no more than one page. Be sure to include an action step your representative can take. Don't read from the talking points but use them to guide you in your meeting. Practice in advance of the meeting with each of you taking on different roles.

Third, be persistent in seeking to *meet with the officials you want to influence*. When you meet, briefly introduce yourselves and state your organiza-

Two-Thirds of Nonelderly Uninsured are Low Income, 2003



Note: Low-income is defined as below 200% of the Federal poverty level (\$29,360 for a family of three in 2003)

Source: Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and Uninsured and Urban Institute analysis of the March 2004 Current Population Study.

tion's name, who it represents, and its purpose. For example, "Hello, I'm Sue Smith with Montgomery Health Care Action, a grassroots advocacy group in Maryland's largest county working to solve some of the health care problems in Maryland." Then be brief but compelling in stating what changes you are supporting and what you want from your elected official (this is the action step, also known as "the Ask"). For example, if your organization opposes cuts in medical assistance for the uninsured, say just that. Then you can *ask your elected official to take action*, saying for instance, "Representative Jones, can we count on you to vote yes on Resolution No. 123?" If you have time, *use personal stories* to illustrate the problem. Giving voice to the human impact of a health issue breathes life into hard facts and policy decisions. It also illustrates how your representative's constituents are affected.

Remember, although your representatives are very busy people who won't have much time to spend with you, you are their constituents, the people who have elected them.

Fourth, follow-up by *thanking your representative in a letter* and recapping the meeting, including the action step. Invite your elected official to meet with your organization and get to know, in person, some of his/her constituents and the health issue your group is working on.

8) Create Momentum for Action.

Once your organization has gotten on its feet, you can begin to *organize more widely* for the changes you and your supporters want to achieve. There are many ways to build widespread support for health care reform so we will mention only a few tools to use. Choose those that best fit your community's circumstances and your organization's person power. Create your own and tailor them to fit the political climate you are working with.

Remember, keep the pressure on and find new ad-

vocates to join with you to energize your workforce.

One successful tool is *letters to the editor*. Newspapers often run articles about health care topics. Help your supporters see news articles as an opportunity to submit letters to the editor about the need for health care reform. Prepare basic letters in advance on the health changes you support and then link them to the news (see the Appendix for sample letters). Also, be sure to have an up-to-date list of local and regional newspapers and how to submit letters to each. You can also prepare talking points for letters to the editor so that your supporters can write their own if they want to be more creative (see the Appendix).

It is always extremely helpful to have your elected representatives write *commentaries* on a health care problem (and a proposed solution) to local newspapers. These could be in the form of *op-eds*. Again, be prepared. Since your representatives are busy people, the best approach is to contact staff and offer to help write the commentary, or supply them with background materials and facts.

Another tool is to have your supporters submit articles to their organizations' *newsletters* or bulletins. Many civic, non-profit, and faith-based groups have these. Again, help your supporters by having suggested language or talking points for a newsletter submission (see the Appendix).

Create a *speakers bureau* within your group. Invite some of your most ardent supporters, those with good speaking skills, and others with name recognition in your community to participate. Along with your "*Traveling Road Show*" you can get your group invited to speak on health care at various events in your community. Run announcements in organizations' newsletters and bulletins, telling organizations that your group is available to speak on health care in your community. Check the events calendar for your community and offer to speak at

health fairs, political rallies, women's meetings, etc.

When specific proposals for health care changes and programs are on the table, there are a number of actions you may want to consider. You may want to work with your town or county council to pass *resolutions* supporting specific changes or programs, or demonstrating its support for health care for all. Couple the passage of a resolution with letters to the editor and op-eds in support.

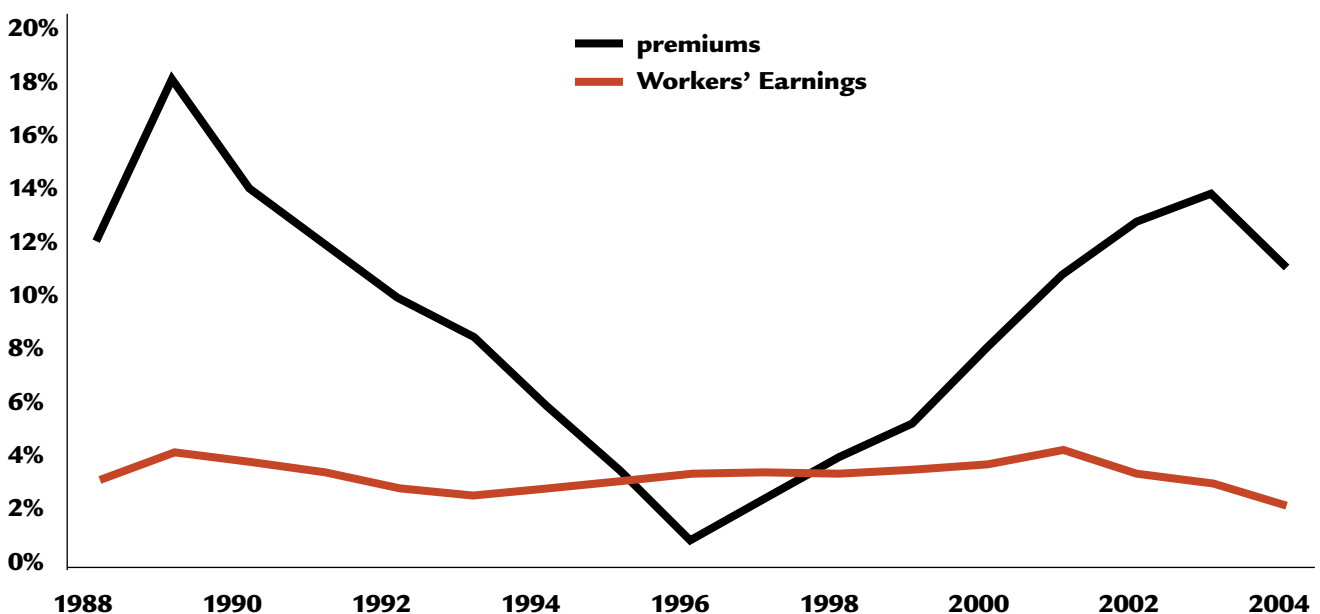
If specific bills are being considered in your local or state elected body, you will want to submit or present *testimony* when the bills reach the floor, either for or against what is being proposed. Work with your representatives who support your position in crafting the testimony. You can either present testimony in written form, or you can sign up to present it in person. Be sure to follow the rules of your elected body and track the legislation so that your testimony is ready when the time is right.

Your group may want to consider *rallies*, *community forums* (see box), and *call-ins* (see box) as other

tools for supporting specific proposals for health care change. While these take time to organize, they are very effective tools for garnering the support of larger numbers of people for a specific change you want to see. At Montgomery Health Care Action we held a community forum that featured one of our representatives to the US Congress, community activists, clergy, and our statewide health partners. Our purpose was to both educate the public about a health care for all bill in the Maryland General Assembly and to motivate people to take action in support of the legislation. We provided attendees with an **Action Pack** to take with them. Later on we held telephone call-ins at several churches. We came on Sundays with lots of cell phones and, after services, provided people with a simple script, a cell phone, and the number to call their elected representatives to ask their support of the legislation. On Monday morning, our representatives had lots of messages in support of health care for all!

Job-Based Premium Increases Greater than Wage Increases

Percent change from previous year



Source: "Employer Health Benefits 2004 Annual Survey," Kaiser Family Foundation/Health Research and Educational Trust, September 2004.

Some Final Thoughts

Grassroots community organizing is never as straightforward as outlined in this guide. In fact, organizing tends to be messy with fits and starts, successes and failures. Don't despair. Or, as the old saying goes, *Don't Agonize, Organize!*

This guide is meant to be a starting point. Your group will want to elaborate on the ideas and suggestions presented here and even change them to meet your own needs. You will want to be flexible in creating solutions to the problems you see and considering what may be unique to your community. Be creative and be bold. But, be thoughtful and respectful of the process of organizing. Organizing takes time and patience... lots of both!

There are several ways to keep your organization together and moving forward. One way is to always keep a sense of humor. At Montgomery Health Care Action we take our work seriously but, not so seriously that we don't laugh out loud, a lot. Another

way is to celebrate various milestones, large and small, or just celebrate your work together. Have a potluck gathering for the group or a party with music and dancing. Yet another way to *keep on keepin' on* is to take a break from organizing. At Montgomery Health Care Action, we are most active during the fall, winter, and spring when the Maryland General Assembly is in session. We work less during the summers when our people take vacations. This helps us recharge our batteries for the fall.

And, remember, you are not alone doing this work. Lots of groups, large and small, are working on reforming our health care system. You may not know them all and they may not know you. But, you are all in this together, and for the long haul, to bring comprehensive health care to all Americans. We wish you the best!

(Please send us your feedback on this toolkit, any questions you may have, or ideas you want to share. We really want to hear from you! You can reach Anne Kasper at askasper@aol.com or Virginia Richardson at vmr9202@comcast.net, Marion Mudd at marion9507@starpower.net, and Deborah Schumann at drabubo@comcast.net)

Look ahead. You are not expected to complete the task. Nor are you permitted to lay it down.

— T H E T A L M U D



Media Release

For Immediate Release - June 1, 2005

Montgomery County Leaders call for Fair Share Veto Override Veto called "short-sighted." Residents decry move and call for change.

BETHESDA - In the first political action since the Governor's veto of the Fair Share Health Care bill, Montgomery Health Care ACTION is bringing together Maryland political and civic leaders, local clergy, activists and concerned citizens to press for an override and to rally for change.

During the 2005 legislative session, both houses of the Maryland General Assembly passed the "Fair Share Health Care" bill by a veto-proof majority. The bill requires all Maryland employers with 10,000 or more employees to provide benefits equaling 8% of their payroll or pay the difference into the state's Medicaid program. Even though the bill has large statewide public support (78% support, 65% support among Republicans; Gonzales Research Poll 1/05), the bill was vetoed by Gov. Robert Ehrlich. This event was the first citizen response to the Governor's veto.

Speakers included **Congressman Chris Van Hollen, Del. William Bronrott, Del. Marilyn Goldwater, Del. Ana Sol Gutierrez, Del. Susan Lee**, Montgomery County Councilmembers **Tom Perez, Steve Silverman and George Leventhal, Glenn Schneider** of the Maryland Health Care for All! Coalition, and a number of faith leaders from around Montgomery County.

Dr. Deborah Schumann of Montgomery Health Care Action said, "With everyone seeing double digit increases in their families health care costs, requiring large employers to do their fair share only makes sense. The Governor's veto was short sighted and should be overridden by our Assembly members next January." **Glenn E. Schneider**, Executive Director of the Health Care for All! Coalition agreed, "Every time an uninsured worker goes to an emergency room and cannot afford to pay for treatment, taxpayers foot the bill. The Fair Share Health Care Bill will ensure that taxpayers no longer have to bear the enormous health care costs of large, rich companies in Maryland."

Montgomery Health Care ACTION (MCHA) is a grassroots movement working to achieve health care coverage for all Marylanders; it works in partnership with the River Road Unitarian Church.



Sample Newsletter Article

Over the summer and fall, we have been regrouping and streamlining Montgomery Health Care Action to be better able to tackle big local and state health care reform needs. We began with a hugely successful Rally for Health Care in June to demonstrate our dismay over the governor's veto of the legislature-approved Fair Share Health Care bill. And, once again we take up our legislative work with our statewide partner organization, the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative. We sense change in the air! It's time for a change, isn't it?

In 2005-2006 we plan to work to advance a three-part legislative agenda: 1) The over arching bill, "Health Care for All!" which will provide comprehensive health care coverage for all Marylanders. 2) The "Healthy Maryland Initiative" a bill that will reduce teen smoking by 16%, reduce long term health care costs by over \$1 billion, and raise enough money to significantly expand health care to some 50,000 currently uninsured people by raising the state's tobacco tax by \$1 per pack. 3) A veto override of the governor's veto of the "Fair Share Health Care" bill which will require large companies to contribute towards health insurance coverage for their employees.

Look for two forum speakers on health care reform. On October 30, Dr. Jerry Earll, speaking for Physicians for a National Health Plan, who will describe the alarming condition of our nation's health care system. Dr. Earll will also tell us how we can cover the uninsured with a national plan and save money too by knocking out the middle men. Plenty of controversy there!

The second speaker on December 4 is the wonderful, buoyant Glenn Schneider, Executive Director of the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, who will launch the 2006 legislative health care reform agenda that will tip Maryland over to the national scene in health care reform. Glenn is known to us as our friend and "can-do" counselor. Much more information about the MCHI and their outstanding work can be found by visiting <http://www.healthcareforall.com>.

Your task force is, more than ever, linking with powerful coalitions such as Medicaid Matters MD, Progressive Maryland, labor unions, faith-based organizations, and national health care groups.

We will soon have ready a unique tool kit for organizing, 'Taking Action on Health Care for All! A Guide to Organizing in Your Community' as well as new brochures, improved films, a speaker's bureau, and more. We're readying for action!

If volunteering at area clinics is your forte, lobbying or writing/editing, jump in at any point. We will need each and every one of you if we are ever to get all this work done. Contact us through Virginia Richardson or Debbie Schumann.



How to Hold a Community Forum

- Set a date several months in advance.
- Reserve a low-cost space such as a place of worship, library, school auditorium, or community center. With good parking.
- Plan the program to be no more than an hour, with time for questions and answers.
- Invite speakers well in advance. Choose diverse speakers such as elected officials, advocates, clergy, business leaders, and health professionals in favor of health care reform. Invite a well-known member of your community to speak to help draw a crowd.
- Announce your event through your supporting organizations' newsletters, local newspapers, community events calendars, and any other free media such as bulletins of social service organizations as well as faith-based, community health, labor, immigrant, housing, and women's groups. Prepare a press release closer to the date and send it to all local papers and radio stations. Publicizing your event is key to a good turnout.
- Plan who will speak, when, and what topic for each person to cover. Choose an MC (master of ceremonies) with good public speaking skills. The job of the MC will be to keep the program on track and on time.
- Prepare written talking points for your speakers, if needed. Prepare a detailed, timed agenda and speaker introductions for the MC to use. Prepare any visuals you may need.
- Prepare hand-outs on how to: contact elected officials, write a letter to the editor, influence your representatives, and write an effective newsletter article. Include this and any compelling fact sheets, reports to the community, and news articles on health care in an Action Pack to give to forum attendees. Ask attendees to sign in with their contact information and interest so that you can call on them in the future.
- Plan on having several members of your group welcome people to the forum. Have refreshments available afterwards and encourage people to stay and talk. Create a vibrant and engaging atmosphere.



We support the Health Care for All Plan

Resolution for Organizations

WHEREAS: Over 800,000 Marylanders have no health insurance and hundreds of thousands of others have inadequate health care coverage, and

WHEREAS: At least 80% of the uninsured and the underinsured are workers and their families, and

WHEREAS: The "Health Care for All" Plan (aka "the Plan") released by the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative in December 2002 will guarantee all Marylanders access to quality and affordable health coverage; and

WHEREAS: The Plan expands coverage in the private sector whenever possible and offers public subsidized coverage only to those who truly need it; and

WHEREAS: The Plan treats the business community fairly—all businesses will be required to either offer quality, affordable health care to their employees or pay a "fair share" contribution into a fund for the uninsured thereby eliminating the unfair competitive edge enjoyed by firms that do not offer health care to their employees; and

WHEREAS: The Plan builds on the health care system already established in Maryland and does not create any new large bureaucracies or require new general fund revenue to support it; and

WHEREAS: The Plan is fiscally responsible and is funded in part by charging fair premiums to the newly insured, maximizing federal matching dollars, raising the state tobacco tax, reallocating funds from existing programs for the uninsured, and collecting employer health care contributions from non-participating businesses; and

WHEREAS: The undersigned organization has reviewed the Health Care for All Plan; and

BE IT RESOLVED, That the undersigned organization endorses the Health Care for All Plan released in December 2002 and revised in October 2003; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the undersigned organization will educate its members and, to the extent that it is able, educate the general public and opinion leaders, about its endorsement of this Plan.

Organization _____ No. of Members _____

Authorized Signature _____ Date _____

Contact Name (and Title) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Best way to contact you (check one box): Email Fax Phone

Please return to

Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative Education Fund, 2600 Saint Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21218
410-235-9000 (phone), 410-235-8963 (fax), Email: plan@healthcareforall.com



Montgomery Health Care Action Getting Heard

Writing letters to the Editor

Do people read the editorial section of the paper? Of course they do! Get your key messages in print and reach thousands of people at once. Here are some tips that might help you get your letter published...

Be brief.

Most newspapers will only accept letters of 200 words or less. Less is best.

Be timely.

Write a letter in response to something you recently read in that paper. Timely letters get printed more often than letters "out of the blue." Start off with a phrase like, "Your recent article on the uninsured raised some important points..." Quickly make the move on to your key points.

Get personal.

Why does this topic matter to you? "As an uninsured person, I feel compelled to write about your article on the uninsured."

State 1-2 key points and stay on topic.

Your letter should convey one to two main points to the reader. Pick your key messages and stick to them. Don't stray from the 1-2 key points you wish to make.

Stay away from personal attacks.

Don't write, "The person who wrote that article is clearly an idiot." You can criticize a point, a fact, or a subject matter but never attack a person.

Include your contact information.

Make sure you include your address, your daytime and evening telephone numbers, and your cell phone. If you are authorized to represent a group, submit your letter on letterhead or indicate that you represent that group. Many papers will call you to verify that you wrote the letter. Without contact info, you can be sure your letter will remain unpublished.

Be aware of the paper's submission policy.

Some newspapers have a weekly deadline for submitting letters to the editor and a maximum length restriction. Follow these guidelines and you are more likely to get published.



Sample letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

What Maryland should do to ensure that everyone has access to health care is pass the Health Care for All plan. Only then will every Marylander have guaranteed coverage.

Skyrocketing costs and the threat of losing health insurance threaten every employer and every working family. Every time labor bargains with management, health insurance is a top issue. It leads to more conflict and strikes.

We've tried managed care. It failed. We've tried shifting costs. That failed, too and it only made things worse, because people delayed getting the care they needed—only to require more expensive care in emergencies.

Maryland has always been a leader in health care. Now is the time to take the next step: Health Care for All.

To the Editor:

I am encouraged by the growing talk of health care for all in the state. It's about time. People who are self-employed and their families are in danger of being completely priced out of the health insurance market even though our businesses help drive the economy.

As a businessperson, I am willing to pay my fair share. I don't want free health care. I want affordable and comprehensive health care.

From what I've seen, the Health Care for All plan is the only show in town that makes sense.

To the Editor:

I am a small business owner who would offer health care to my employees if I could. But if I did, my costs would mean that I would not be able to compete for jobs.

With a state plan, under which all businesses would be required to pay the same amount, my employees would be able to get the care they deserve.



Key talking points for Letters to the Editor

In Maryland, over 800,000 people have no health insurance coverage. Families are suffering, lives are lost, and everyone with health insurance is left holding the bill. Un-insurance costs us all—dearly!

The Maryland *Health Care for All* Plan provides a blueprint that our state can follow to achieve a market-based, fair, responsible, and economically sound universal health care system. The plan builds on the strengths of our existing private and public-sector systems and finds medical homes for over 800,000 uninsured Marylanders.

All employers and individuals in our state should make a “fair share” contribution to achieve health care for all. Employers who now provide health insurance are significantly subsidizing those who do not. This plan eliminates this subsidy by creating a financial incentive for employers to begin offering quality, affordable health care to their employees.

Pay now or pay later. We currently spend over \$1.4 billion a year in Maryland on the uninsured. They get limited hospital care, continued health problems, huge bills, ruined credit, and bankruptcy proceedings. We get higher taxes, higher premiums, higher costs for goods and services, and the feeling that we are one pink slip away from joining their ranks.

States are the laboratories for change in our democracy. Recently, Maine enacted a universal health plan for its residents. Vermont has a plan that covers most of its residents. California enacted a health care reform plan which will require large employers to provide coverage to employees. Other states are moving towards health care reform.

Maryland has a long and proud history of reform in the service of its people. Montgomery County is Maryland’s most populous and populist county. Support for *Health Care for All* is growing in our county. We can be the instruments for change in Maryland!



Maryland Leaders Rally for Health Care

River Road Unitarian Church Bethesda, Maryland

June 1, 2005, 1-2 p.m.

- 1 Congressman Chris Van Hollen**
- 2 Delegate William Bronrott**
- 3 Delegate Marilyn Goldwater**
- 4 Delegate Susan Lee**
- 5 County Councilmember Tom Perez, invited**
- 6 County Councilmember Steven Silverman, invited**
- 7 County Councilmember George Leventhal, invited**

800,000 Maryland citizens are without health insurance; nearly 100,000 of those live in Montgomery County. People who lack insurance coverage frequently receive care under crisis conditions in an emergency room. The costs of emergency care are overwhelming state budgets when preventive treatment through insurance would have been more effective and cheaper.

During the 2005 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly passed three health care bills:

- 1) *Fair Share Health Care Bill* requiring all large employers in Maryland to contribute a fair share of the premiums for employees health insurance. The "Wal-Mart bill".
- 2) *Community Health Care Access and Safety Net Act* allocating more money to community health centers.
- 3) *Maryland Pharmacy Discount Program* opening up the discount program to low income people.

"Every time an uninsured worker from companies like Wal-Mart goes to an emergency room and cannot afford to pay for treatment, taxpayers foot the bill. The Fair Share Health Care Bill will ensure that taxpayers no longer have to bear the enormous health care costs of large, rich companies in Maryland."

—Vinnie DeMarco, *Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative*

**Come hear the latest on health care in Maryland!
Support overriding the veto of Fair Share Health Care!**



How to Hold a Call-In to Your Representatives

- Identify a favorable time to contact representatives, such as when legislation for health care reform is being seriously considered.
- Contact a membership organization that supports your work on health care reform, such as a faith group or political meet-up. Set a date with the leadership of that group for the health care call-in.
- Identify the jurisdictions of interest and their representatives. A map is useful so that people can match their addresses with their correct representatives. Pictures of representatives are helpful so that callers can relate to them.
- Get accurate phone numbers, addresses, and e-mails for all the targeted representatives. Test the phone numbers in advance of the call-in.
- Prepare visuals such as posters to announce that the call-in is about reaching our elected officials and asking them to support health care reform that is moving forward.
- Come to the call-in with multiple cell phones charged and ready.
- Write short scripts of the message you want callers to give their representatives. Give each caller a cell phone and a script once they have identified their representatives and phone numbers. If it is after hours, encourage callers to leave the script's message as well as their name and address.
- Bring prepared post cards and letters to be mailed to representatives for those who do not want to make calls. Offer to mail them once they are signed.