



A Call to Action

We have a unique opportunity in our nation's history to reshape and reform health and health care in America. We must not be deterred by this daunting challenge—we must face it and succeed, because good health and health care are essential to each and every one of us and to the strength and successful future of our nation.

- **America's health is built on the health of each and every individual.** Our ability to pursue our lives as we choose depends on our health. We must strive to be a society where all individuals are able to reach their highest potential for health.
- **America's health is key to our future social viability.** As a nation we have, and will continue, to rely on younger generations to care for those who are older. Today, America's workers contribute to the Social Security and Medicare needs of our retired citizens. A sicker America means higher retirement and health care costs for seniors. A sicker America also means fewer workers, fewer earnings, and fewer contributions to our system of Social Security upon which we have relied for generations. We run the risks of bankrupting our children and of a future with no financial security for millions.
- **America's health is the backbone of our economy.** The nation's businesses know that a healthy workforce is a productive workforce and that, in turn, leads to a productive and vibrant economy. And workers know that a thriving economy keeps America working. Without health, without a vibrant economy, we place at risk all of the strengths and advantages we have built over generations. Without change, America may easily fall from its position of leadership and strength in the world.
- **America's health is essential to our national security.** We are a nation always at risk and periodically at war. We must have a strong health care system in times of disaster—both natural and those wrought by man—to sustain our national security.

For all its strengths, today's system of delivering and paying for care is not ready to respond to a nation facing a changing economic, physical, and social environment. The movement for health reform is not new. But it has long been clear that the solutions are economically and politically difficult. We've tried, but progress has been slow, small, and piecemeal. The lack of strong national leadership and no national health policy to guide us has resulted in little action since the last major health care debate some 15 years ago.

Health and health care in America are ready for change, not because they have failed, but because America has a history of reinventing the things it values most to meet the needs of its people in a challenging and changing world.

In the decades of the 20th century, America built a health care system that for much of that time responded well to the needs of a unique and growing nation—a nation that was from the outset like no other in the history of the world. Hospitals were built; legions of doctors, nurses, and others were trained; great universities led the way with discoveries that changed the world; private industry produced products and services that became routinely available to millions of people. Government, employers, and others made insurance widely available, giving hundreds of millions of people access to care and services when and where they needed them. Health care grew the way America grew: with energy, innovation, and a boisterous conviction that if America created it, it would be the best.

But at the close of that remarkable century and into the early years of the 21st, two things became clear: many of the old models and methods of providing health care were becoming obsolete and the health of the American people was beginning to decline.

Nearly 50 million people have no health insurance. Families, businesses, and government are being financially crippled by rising costs. Serious problems in quality, safety, and efficiency seem increasingly difficult to solve. Shortages of physicians, nurses, and other caregivers, already a serious problem, are predicted to grow even worse. Many hospitals and other sources of care operate on the financial edge at a time when demand for care is on the rise and expectations for cure continue to increase.

Equally troubling: a century of growth, social and economic change, industrialization, and commercialization have taken a terrible toll on the health of the American people, resulting in an older, sicker America.

Not only is our population aging, but chronic illness of all kinds—diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and many others—are striking down more Americans, young and old. For perhaps the first time in our history, we face the possibility that America's next generation will be less healthy than its forbearers.

Our current path is unsustainable. Can we envision a different future? Now is the time for change.

A National Framework for Change

We look to create a different future for America's health and health care...to create a system by design, not by default.

And why? Without fundamental change we will not achieve critical, collective objectives for the health care system in America. The objectives include:

- **Promote health, wellness and prevention.** A reformed health care system will use incentives to encourage healthy behaviors, promote wellness throughout life, and routinely provide coverage for preventive care.
- **Provide everyone access to essential medical care.** A reformed health care system will ensure everyone has access to and coverage for the care they need.
- **Encourage personal involvement in health and health care.** A reformed health care system will require transparency by all, create informed and involved consumers of care, and encourage everyone to be an active participant in their health and health care.
- **Encourage greater social responsibility on the part of all health care stakeholders.** Any entity with a financial interest in American health care bears a special and broader responsibility to a society already challenged in serving the care needs for all.
- **Make care and coverage simpler and more affordable.** A reformed health care system will optimize administrative efficiency, encourage standardization, and minimize administrative costs and unnecessary litigation.
- **Create incentives for high quality, cost-effective, coordinated care.** A reformed health care system will create and align payment incentives for better coordinated care, encourage greater clinical integration, and promote chronic care management.
- **Use information to provide effective and efficient care.** A reformed health care system will speed the adoption and use of electronic health records and other health information technology to better care for patients and assess the health status of communities.

To achieve these goals, we as a nation must pursue broad-based, health care system change. Ensuring coverage for all is critical, but expanding coverage alone will not achieve the objectives required to set us on a better course of health and health care for the future.

Hundreds of discussions with key health care stakeholders have revealed core elements of health reform—elements that are essential to achieving real and meaningful change. These core elements create a National Framework for Change and define the ways in which we can make change happen. Without fundamental change the objectives above cannot be accomplished. That framework is called *Health for Life: Better Health. Better Health Care.*

The five core elements of reform in *Health for Life* are:

- **Coverage for All, Paid for By All**
- **A Focus on Wellness**
- **Most Efficient, Affordable Care**
- **Highest Quality Care**
- **Best Information**

Opportunities for Leadership

Attached is a National Framework for Change—*Health for Life*—that begins to move us in a better direction. It was developed by the combined effort of many stakeholders and is intended to lead a nation in change. It outlines the action steps that can be taken:

- By stakeholders in coalition—to push for the federal and state public policy action needed and
- By each stakeholder—to act on opportunities available to each and every one of us to improve America's health and health care.

By Stakeholders in Coalition

Some improvements in America's health and health care will require changes in public policy—in the laws and regulations that shape how care is provided today. Stakeholders must harness our collective power in coalition to make system change occur. Some improvements will require changes in public policy and action on the part of federal and state governments to make that happen.

Health for Life includes a set of public policy ideas outlining specific changes that can be made at the federal and state level to transform health and health care in America. Those policy ideas were developed by six expert advisory groups involving experts in these issues from nearly 100 different organizations representing consumers, business, labor, insurers, physicians, nurses, hospitals, and others. These ideas represent a strong consensus across the groups of ways in which we can begin to move America in the right direction toward transforming health and health care. More detail on these public policy ideas is available under *Health for Life* at www.aha.org.

By Each Stakeholder

In addition, many improvements are already being made without public policy change and must continue. The nation's hospitals and health systems commit to pursue excellence in the care we provide and in improving the health of our communities. But success will require everyone to commit to change and to work together. We call on others—insurers, business, physicians, health care suppliers and vendors, and government—to do their part as well.

Health for Life includes examples of the kinds of change each one of us can make in order to make a difference in health and health care now. The list of stakeholders is not exhaustive, and possible stakeholder contributions are not complete. But it gives us a roadmap of changes we can make by taking challenges into our own hands and reshaping them for the better. The ideas are organized based on the six aims outlined by the Institute of Medicine—aims designed to make care in this country more safe, timely, effective, efficient, equitable, and patient-focused.

A window of opportunity is here. Trends in health and health care in this nation are unsustainable. We can envision and create a better future for us all. We can and must choose to do so...now. Change is in our hands.