

Health for Life: Better Health. Better Health Care.

Issue

Every day health care professionals struggle to provide the best possible care from within a needlessly complex, uncoordinated non-system of health and health care. Add to that, tens of millions who have little or no access to basic care and it's clear that reform of American health care is imperative.

Unfortunately, it has been 15 years since our last serious, national dialogue on health care reform. Since then the challenges facing health and health care have gotten worse. More Americans worry about health care costs than about losing their jobs, paying their rent or being a victim of a terrorist attack. Not surprisingly, health care is a major issue in the 2008 presidential campaign.

AHA View

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 is essential to the strength and successful future of our nation:

For the past few years, the AHA Board of Trustees, in cooperation with our nine regional policy boards, governing councils, committees and the state, regional and metropolitan hospital associations explored and discussed what changes would be needed to successfully address the challenges facing American health and health care.

One thing that the AHA Board of Trustees realized is that successful reform would take a commitment from the nation's hospitals to lead. To that end, last summer, the Board unveiled *Health for Life: Better Health. Better Health Care*. This framework is not the hospital's plan for reform, but rather, an evolving public document designed for dissemination, discussion and ultimately improvement.

National Framework for Change



Health for Life identifies five essential elements of reform upon which we must build if our nation wants to achieve better health and better health care: **health coverage for all, paid for by all; a focus on wellness; the most efficient, affordable care; the highest quality care; and the best information** – for both consumers and providers.

- **Health Coverage for All, Paid for by All.** Everyone – individuals, businesses, insurers and government – must play a role in expanding and paying for health coverage for all. Experience has taught us coverage for all will be our toughest challenge, politically and financially. There are many ways to accomplish this goal; we must remain firm on the objective but flexible on how to achieve it.
- **Focus on Wellness.** Good health – physical, mental and oral – is essential for a productive and vibrant America. A focus on wellness must be integrated into the lifecycle, from birth to death, and be encouraged in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities.



- **Most Efficient, Affordable Care.** America will not, should not be satisfied unless and until the cost of insurance and health care are affordable. We need to better manage chronic disease, spend limited resources on care, not paperwork; and address the growing shortage of well-trained health care workers. And, useful information on quality and pricing must be made public, so that patients, providers and payers have the information they need to make informed decisions.
- **Highest Quality Care.** The best care happens when caregivers and patients work as a team to make the right decisions with the best possible information. We need to invest in research that will identify and rewards the use of industry-accepted best practices. We must coordinate the treatment of physical and behavioral health needs, reward care outcomes and make palliative care more available. And we have to ensure that our workforce is able to deliver the care we need today and into the future.
- **Best Information.** Good information is the gateway to good care and good research. We have to accelerate the adoption of health information technology by addressing the financial, regulatory and technological barriers, including inter-operability and standardization.

Moving Forward in Coalition. The AHA Board launched an initiative to seek the reactions, advice and support of other stakeholders. Six expert advisory groups involving leaders from nearly 100 different organizations representing consumers, business, labor, insurers, physicians, nurses, hospitals and others were convened to develop policy ideas to lead the effort. The outcome: 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.

Some improvements will require changes in the laws and regulations that shape how care is provided today. But many improvements are already being made without public policy changes. The nation's hospitals and health systems commit to pursue excellence by making changes that will help achieve the goals of the Institute of Medicine's *Six Aims for Improvement* – care that is safe, timely, effective, efficient, equitable and patient-focused. But to improve America's health, everyone must lead, participate and share responsibility. We call on others – physicians, consumers, insurers, employers and governments – to do their part as well.

The specifics of *Health for Life* will evolve as others add to its strengths and details. What will not change is the goal of making America a nation of healthy people, leading more balanced lives and managing chronic disease whenever possible. And when they need health care, they will enter a genuine system that is efficient, affordable and accessible to all, of high quality, with coverage for everyone, and provides a care experience that exceeds expectations.

