



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.