

**Contacts:** Nick Ferreyros, 202-745-5102  
Patrick McCabe, 202-745-5100

## **LEADERS OF MAJOR NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATE ON APPROACHES TO HEALTH REFORM**

*Diverse groups work together to exchange perspectives,  
identify options for congressional action*

Washington, D.C. – Leaders from widely diverse national organizations today stressed their mutual commitment to reform of the nation’s health care system, calling it an “urgent, national necessity” that requires different stakeholders to cooperate in ways that they did not in previous reform efforts. The organizations, in identifying a number of policy approaches where they have reached consensus, pledged to work with lawmakers and each other to support the enactment of comprehensive reform this Congress.

Through a process they called Health Reform Dialogue, the organizations began holding facilitated discussions six months ago in order to create a forum outside of the political arena for exchanging views on tough policy issues. The participants – all principals of their respective organizations – launched the process to foster a greater sense of cooperation in the forthcoming national health reform debate, and provide broad-based support for congressional health reform efforts. In addition to sharing candid perspectives with each other privately before formal debate on health reform begins, the participants found areas of early consensus they believe can provide Congress with a solid foundation for reforming the health system.

“We entered this process knowing that the issues are complex, and with no illusions that these groups would reach agreement on every aspect of reform. But the diversity of perspectives that were shared at one table, and the spirit of commitment from all sides, made these discussions totally unlike anything that happened in 1994, and that bodes well,” said Rich Umbdenstock, president and CEO, American Hospital Association. “Now more than ever before, all of us agree that fundamental reform of the nation’s health care system is critical – right now, this year – and is essential for every sector of society. The American people want bipartisan, responsible reform, and all of us do, too.”

The groups – representing employers, workers, hospitals, nurses, physicians, consumers, insurers, public health professionals, and others – described a process that they believe will help pave the road for comprehensive reforms to be approved by this Congress.

“While our organizations have worked either side-by-side or across the table for many years, we’ve seen a great benefit from creating this formal dialogue to increase understanding of each other’s positions. I think it reflects that we have all learned from the last health care debate,” said John Castellani, president, Business Roundtable. “This dialogue will pay off as congressional discussion about various reform options gets into full swing,”

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Providing a report on the progress-to-date of their discussions, participating organizations identified specific ideas for reform, including methods to expand health coverage, greatly reduce the growth rate for health care costs, and ultimately promote more effective and efficient care. Ideas shared focus on several over-arching principles that participants unanimously agree should be cornerstones for successful health care reform, including:

1. Expanding health care coverage options to extend insurance to the 46 million Americans who are uninsured;
2. Reducing the growth of health care costs by increasing value for American health care consumers. Key reforms include implementing Medicare payment reforms, improving billing efficiencies, closing gaps in quality and outcomes; and
3. Fostering an environment in which prevention, wellness and primary care – not just diagnosis and treatment – are the cornerstones of high-quality care, and more.

The group provided ideas for reform that included consensus on collective and individual responsibility and measures to significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of care. They include:

- Reforms aimed at having all Americans purchase or otherwise obtain health insurance.
- Advanceable, refundable tax credits or other subsidies to help more people afford health coverage.
- Federal funding to help states with rising Medicaid costs, and establishing a baseline for Medicaid eligibility for all adults at no less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level.
- A public-private partnership to research ways to compare clinical effectiveness of treatments.
- Medicare payment reforms to increase value by improving prevention and care coordination.
- Funding for education, training, and loan forgiveness programs as components in a dynamic planning process to bolster the primary care and nursing workforce.

The group's report also calls for an upfront investment to help set the health system on a path toward significant long-term savings and improve the long-term fiscal future of the nation.

“For decades, attempts to reform America’s health system have met with fractious debate,” said Georges C. Benjamin, M.D., F.A.C.P., F.A.C.E.P. (E), executive director, American Public Health Association. “Until now, comprehensive health care reform has been deadlocked. The time has come to set aside some of our differences, talk openly with each other, and begin to find common ground. This process has significantly helped steer us toward that outcome.”

Organizations participating in the Health Reform Dialogue include: AARP, Advanced Medical Technology Association, America’s Health Insurance Plans, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American College of Physicians, American Hospital Association, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, American Public Health Association, Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, Business Roundtable, Catholic Health Association of the United States, Families USA, Federation of American Hospitals, Healthcare Leadership Council, National Federation of Independent Business, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

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