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## Metro Detroiters get a say in how to heal health care

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The unassailable truth of a health care crisis in southeast Michigan is becoming more evident every day.

Headlines tell us the city of Detroit has more than \$7 billion in unfunded health care promised to its retirees; layoffs throughout our region are stressing an already-strapped health care system; and General Motors Chief Executive Rick Wagoner says the "health care burden" affects every business as well as government, crippling our ability to grow jobs and the economy.

These reports and others from around the nation only solidify what we already know: The American health care system is broken. And so is the search for fixes. The people most concerned about this complex problem -- you and I -- have not had a good opportunity to have our say.

Until now.

The health care debate in our country has become an incubator for polarizing rhetoric and a confusion of facts. Pundits, politicians and interest groups push solutions, cling to ideologies or protect economic positions. This debate goes on while millions of Americans either have no health coverage -- 45.8 million at last count -- or they are paying more for what they have, and overall health care costs continue a decades-long climb. Most recent estimates indicate that health care will increase to \$11,000 per person, up from \$6,400 in 2004.

Left out of the debate and the rhetoric are the very people who use the health care system and pay the bills -- everyday Americans. That changes this month, and I encourage everyone to find the time to have their say about health care.

As part of the vast Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, a little-noticed provision established a working group made up of ordinary Americans who, like most of us, care deeply about whether the health care system is working.

These 14 individuals of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group were selected from hundreds of applicants by the non-partisan Government Accountability Office and began their work in early 2005. They have the job of seeking out the opinions and recommendations of Americans and, based on what they hear, reporting their conclusions and recommendations to Congress and the president.

To be heard, citizens must speak up. Public meetings are taking place across the nation, including here in southeast Michigan with gatherings in Detroit and Ann Arbor. A Web site also awaits citizens' views, and surveys are being mounted.

This is an important opportunity for people to express their opinions on what parts of health care work and what don't, and what they think most needs to be repaired.

Together, we can help break the gridlock and contribute practical solutions to a health care system badly in need of good sense. This is an opportunity for everyone to make their voices heard. I urge you to be one of those voices.

*Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan, co-chaired a committee of the National Academies of Science that recommended ways to provide health care for the uninsured.*