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CONSENSUS IN AMERICA: AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

National Dialogue Reveals Consensus to Make Health Care System Work for All Americans

Washington, DC -- The Citizens' Health Care Working Group, a panel authorized by the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act, issued a report today demonstrating remarkable consensus among Americans for public policy that ensures all Americans--regardless of their financial resources or health status--have affordable health care coverage.

The consensus on the part of the American people offers a stark contrast to the Washington gridlock on health care reform. In fact, this very gridlock prompted a bipartisan initiative to seek direct input from the American people on how the nation's health care system is working for them and on what reform of this system should look like.

One citizen's comment reflects the concern and frustration many Americans have with today's health care, saying people cannot "navigate the health care system without luck, a relationship, money and perseverance."

The Working Group recommendations are an important step toward fixing the kind of fundamental breakdowns in our system that result in these concerns.

Now, Congress and the President can rely on the direct input of the American people, as well as their urgent desire for immediate action, to shape health care reform so that it works for all Americans.

The overriding message that was consistent in every venue and forum is that:

Americans should have a health care system where everyone participates, regardless of their financial resources or health status, with benefits that are sufficiently comprehensive to ensure access to appropriate, high-quality care without endangering individual or family financial security.

Citizens clearly want a system that covers everyone, and the Working Group recommendations reflect that sentiment. "Everyone pays a fair share, and everyone has health care benefits," represents a typical response from Americans on the health care issue.

The recommendations going to Congress and the President grew out of the Working Group's national dialogue on health care issues over the past year. Average citizens, health care experts, community and health-related organizations, and businesses participated in this dialogue by attending community forums, completing Internet-based surveys, participating in fact finding meetings, and commenting on preliminary recommendations generated by the Working Group based on this nationwide debate. In 37 states where meetings were held, and in more than 28,000 responses on the Internet, the message was consistently loud and clear: Americans want health care for all, and they want it now. The views of participating citizens were consistent with recent national polls. This message also conveys a sense of urgency for immediate fundamental changes in the health care system to ensure the well-being of Americans and their families

The report details America's strong desire for comprehensive health care reform and for changes to happen immediately. The recommendations will be presented to Congress and the President. They include:

1. Create public policy to ensure all Americans have affordable health care by 2012;
2. Guarantee financial protection against high health care costs and all Americans be required to participate in the program;
3. Foster innovative integrated community health networks;
4. Promote efforts to improve quality of care and efficiency of care;
5. Fundamentally restructure the way end-of-life services are financed and provided;
6. Define core benefits and services for all Americans.

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The Citizens' Health Care Working Group consists of 15 members -- 14 citizens of diverse backgrounds from across the country, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. To read member bios or gather more information on the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, visit www.citizenshealthcare.gov.