

ACP

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
INTERNAL MEDICINE | *Doctors for Adults*

August 22, 2006

Citizens' Health Care Working Group
Attn: Comments, Interim Recommendations
7201 Wisconsin Ave., Rm. 575
Bethesda, MD 20814

To Whom It May Concern:

The American College of Physicians (ACP), representing over 120,000 doctors of internal medicine and medical students, appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the Citizens' Health Care Working Group interim report, "Health Care That Works for All Americans." The Working Group's principles and recommendations share many elements with ACP's "Core Principles on Providing Access to Care for all Americans." Most importantly, ACP agrees with the Working Group's conclusion that all Americans should be guaranteed access to affordable health care.

In 2002, ACP developed its own proposal for a step-by-step expansion of health insurance coverage. The proposal, based on ACP's "Core Principles on Providing Access to Care for All Americans," included several specific mechanisms to increase access, including the expansion of public programs, federal premium subsidies, the creation of purchasing pools, and waivers that would allow states to test alternative health care reforms.

Although the Working Group's recommendations focus on very general, systematic reforms that would make health care more accessible—unlike ACP's proposal, which offers specific ways to expand *health insurance coverage*—the two are based on many of the same principles. Like the Working Group, ACP favors sequential reforms to expand access to health care that include both near- and long-term goals. ACP also shares the Working Group's belief that the nation should set a goal of ensuring that all Americans have access to affordable health care by a specified date.

To achieve universal access to care, ACP agrees with the Working Group that our nation must first deal with the basic issues of making sure that everyone is able to get, and keep, basic coverage, regardless of their health care status, need for health services, or ability to pay for coverage. ACP favors the Working Group's recommendation that an independent, non-partisan group be established to create a core benefit package that is continuous, portable, based on sound scientific evidence, and available to all.

ACP also agrees that financial barriers to basic care must be removed by ensuring that assistance is available to those who need it. ACP supports the Working Group's recommendation to strengthen the nation's safety net so that vulnerable populations, including low income and uninsured people and people living in rural and underserved areas, have a source of high quality coordinated care. Furthermore, ACP recognizes that in order to build a market that can provide coverage to everyone, there needs to be several accompanying regulations, including the organization of purchasing pools, benefit standardization, and guaranteed reissue provisions.

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Another important aspect of health care reform recognized by the Working Group is the development of tools to improve the quality and efficiency of care, while at the same time controlling costs. ACP recently released a series of papers examining how health care can move forward on quality improvement and physician performance measures while building the necessary infrastructure for health information technology and other clinical decision support tools. Quality improvement also means strengthening provider-patient communication and giving individuals better access to consumer-friendly information. ACP is pleased the Working Group pointed out the importance of providing patients with meaningful information that enables good health care decision-making.

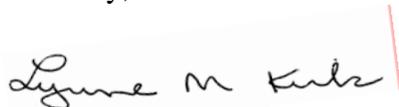
Finally, ACP shares the Working Group's belief that financing strategies for universal coverage be based on principles of fairness and shared responsibility. It is also critical that such financing be predictable and sustainable.

As the Working Group continues to develop recommendations to guide national health reform, ACP urges you to consider the following issues:

- The need to identify target populations as part of a sequential plan (i.e., start by covering those with the lowest incomes);
- Giving states flexibility to investigate different approaches to providing accessible and affordable health care (subject to national standards);
- Mechanisms to make prescription drugs more affordable;
- Ensuring that reimbursement levels for covered services are fair and adequate to reduce barriers to care;
- Stronger emphasis on the goal of eliminating disparities in health care based on social, ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation and demographic differences;
- Stronger emphasis on the need to guarantee basic consumer protection rights, including rights to information and necessary care;
- The need to respect the value individuals place on choice of providers; and
- The need for ongoing evaluations of health care reforms.

ACP commends the Working Group for giving a greater voice to everyday Americans by presenting these thoughtful recommendations on how best to guarantee health care for all. We look forward to working with you to fix our nation's broken health care system.

Sincerely,



Lynne M. Kirk, M.D., FACP
President