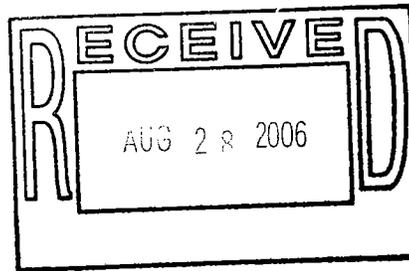




Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The National
Advocacy Center



August 21, 2006

Citizens Health Care Working Group
7201 Wisconsin Avenue
Bethesda MD 20814

Dear Members of the Citizens Health Care Working Group,

The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd would like to thank you for the hard work you have done in gathering public input and developing recommendations to help our country move toward a health care system that works for everyone. We truly hope that this work will help us move beyond the current political stalemate and help create a system in which all Americans have access to quality, affordable health care.

The National Advocacy Center is a faith-based organization sponsored by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and is grounded in Gospel values, Catholic social teaching, and Good Shepherd spirituality. Informed by this rich faith tradition and by the direct service experience of Good Shepherd programs throughout the United States, we educate and advocate for social justice and for the transformation of society to the benefit of all people—giving particular attention to the needs of women, children, and families. This mission and perspective lead to a strong belief that access to affordable, quality healthcare is a fundamental human right and an essential feature of a just society. Since our organization's beginning, we have lobbied for universal and holistic health care in which the dignity of every person is respected.

The National Advocacy Center has followed the activities of the Citizen's Health Care Working Group with great interest and appreciates the efforts of the Working Group to include a variety of perspectives and synthesize the information gathered into thoughtful recommendations. We especially applaud the recommendation that the U.S. government make it an explicit public policy goal to achieve universal access to affordable, quality health care for all by 2012. Also vital in this recommendation is the recognition that this coverage be comprehensive and not contingent upon health status or ability to pay.

Our faith tradition and values teach that health and health care are a shared social responsibility and are essential to the common good. While there has been some innovation at state and local levels, for too long our health systems and our society have treated health care as an individual commodity, even as study after study has shown the community and national implications of high rates of uninsurance and lack of quality care for all. Because of this, we caution against the use of market-driven language (e.g. patients as "consumers") that reinforces such commodification. In order to strengthen the emphasis on public responsibility and national leadership, we encourage the Working Group to make universal access by 2012 the first recommendation.

The National Advocacy Center also supports the recommendation to define a benefit package for all Americans, but we would like the Working Group to provide more information about what these core benefits would be. While the full details do not need to be defined until later, the

structure of the basic benefits should be included in this recommendation and it should specify that benefits needed to maintain and promote good health will not be denied. We understand that cost inevitably factors into the discussion of benefits, but we strongly believe that the primary focus should be on ensuring comprehensive, holistic, patient-centered care. We also urge that this be elevated to the second recommendation because of its importance.

Finally, our faith tradition gives priority to the needs of the poor and vulnerable and we recognize that it is the most vulnerable Americans who are at the greatest disadvantage in our current health system. We commend the Working Group's attention to the most vulnerable in its recommendations to protect against high health care costs, support community health centers, to reform long-term care, and to improve quality and efficiency for all. We believe that these are important first steps, but that they should be more fully integrated into a clear plan to achieve comprehensive, affordable, quality health care for all by 2012. In this, we commend to you the guidelines offered by the Institute on Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

As you begin your work on the final recommendations, we hope that you will continue to be guided by the values of fairness and shared responsibility, and will further integrate respect for human dignity and protection of the most vulnerable into your report. We believe that your work is an important step toward ensuring health care for all and urge the Working Group's continued involvement in sustaining a broad national dialogue and lifting up the voices and experiences of ordinary people. It is clear that strong national leadership and broad social coordination are needed to ensure that access to affordable, comprehensive, quality care for all people remains the central focus of this work. That National Advocacy Center thanks you again for your hard work in articulating a vision and principles for achieving health care that works for all Americans and hope that your final recommendations will provide the needed catalyst for positive political action on health care.

Sincerely,



Alison L. Prevost, *Legislative Analyst*
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