

Healthcare Reform and the Affordable Care Act

After decades of attempts by different administrations and Congresses and after a year of legislative effort in the 111th Congress, the president finally signed into law, in late March 2010, an overhaul of the nation's health care system and a new commitment to access to health insurance for all American citizens. The focus under the new law is largely on prevention of illness and protection of Americans' financial stability in the face of health needs.

While the Affordable Care Act is being phased in over several years – reaching completion in 2014 – many important reforms have taken effect already. Patients with pre-existing conditions can now get coverage, young adults under the age of 26 can stay on their parents' insurance plans, and preventive services are available at little to no cost to patients. Starting in January 2011, further provisions of the ACA took effect, including:

- a 50% discount on brand-name prescriptions for seniors on Medicare Part D;
- free preventive care for seniors (such as cancer screenings, vaccinations for flu and pneumonia, and diabetes testing); and
- new requirements that insurance companies spend at least 80-85% of premium dollars on patient care and improvement of benefits.

By 2014, even more important reforms will be implemented, such as:

- the establishment of transparent and competitive exchanges where individuals and small business owners can purchase affordable insurance plans;
- lowering costs and reducing medical mistakes by coordinating the implementation of electronic health records systems;
- the creation of a voluntary long-term care insurance program to provide benefits to adults who become disabled;
- expanding access to preventive health care services, including extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); and
- providing tax credits to middle-income families and individuals to help make purchasing insurance plans more affordable

The Affordable Care Act is projected to reduce premium costs for millions of families and small

businesses who cannot afford such coverage today. This could help as many as 32 million currently uninsured Americans afford coverage, and prevent millions of bankruptcies due to exorbitant medical costs.

While I acknowledge that the ACA is not perfect and will require some changes as we move forward, I profoundly disagree with those who wish to repeal it wholesale. In January of 2011, the Republican-led House of Representatives passed H.R. 2, a bill to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which would return us to the status quo of insurance company abuses and millions without coverage. H.R. 2 is also projected to add \$210 billion to the national debt over the next ten years. While I do not believe that the ACA is the end of the road to healthcare reform, I am proud of the first step the legislation takes. H.R. 2 is a giant leap backwards.

Medicare and Medicaid

I strongly support Medicare and Medicaid and the benefits they provide to senior citizens, disabled individuals, and low-income families. In April 2011, the House Republicans passed a 2012 budget plan that would dramatically change Medicare and Medicaid programs, decreasing benefits and forcing people to spend more money out of pocket to cover their health care costs.

Under the Republican plan, Medicare beneficiaries would receive the equivalent of vouchers to go out and purchase health care through private insurance companies. Medicare would subsidize the cost at a rate that reflects the age of beneficiaries and general inflation. However, health care costs and insurance premiums have long been rising at a rate much higher than general inflation, meaning that as this program progresses, the government will subsidize less and seniors will pay a growing share. I will not support any plan that imposes greater costs on senior citizens while the government retreats from its obligations.

Medicaid, which benefits low-income children and adults, as well as an increasing number of senior citizens, would also be drastically altered under the Republican plan. Currently, Medicaid provides health coverage through a combination of federal and state money. The 2012 proposal would turn Medicaid into a block grant program, under which the federal government would supply each state with a lump sum equivalent to the general rate of inflation. Again, since health care costs are projected to continue their pattern of rising at a greater rate than general inflation, the Republican proposal for Medicaid would leave state governments, which have already been hit with unprecedented budget shortfalls, bearing the majority of the burden to fund Medicaid.

The long-term effects on senior citizens and low-income families under the Republican proposal for Medicare and Medicaid would be devastating.

More Information

HealthCare.gov

[Massachusetts Health Care](#)

[Health Care Reform and Massachusetts](#)

[H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#)

[H.R. 2, Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act](#)