



BARACK OBAMA AND JOE BIDEN'S PLAN TO LOWER HEALTH CARE COSTS AND ENSURE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ALL

Health care costs are skyrocketing. Health insurance premiums have doubled in the last 8 years, rising 3.7 times faster than wages in the past 8 years, and increasing co-pays and deductibles threaten access to care.¹ Many insurance plans cover only a limited number of doctors' visits or hospital days, exposing families to unlimited financial liability. Over half of all personal bankruptcies today are caused by medical bills.² Lack of affordable health care is compounded by serious flaws in our health care delivery system. About 100,000 Americans die from medical errors in hospitals every year.³ One-quarter of all medical spending goes to administrative and overhead costs, and reliance on antiquated paper-based record and information systems needlessly increases these costs.⁴

Tens of millions of Americans are uninsured because of rising costs. Over 45 million Americans⁵—including over 8 million children⁶—lack health insurance. Eighty percent of the uninsured are in working families.⁷ Even those with health coverage are struggling to cope with soaring medical costs. Skyrocketing health care costs are making it increasingly difficult for employers, particularly small businesses, to provide health insurance to their employees.

Underinvestment in prevention and public health. Too many Americans go without high-value preventive services, such as cancer screening and immunizations to protect against flu or pneumonia. The nation faces epidemics of obesity and chronic diseases as well as new threats of pandemic flu and bioterrorism. Yet despite all of this less than 4 cents of every health care dollar is spent on prevention and public health.⁸ Our health care system has become a disease care system, and the time for change is well overdue.

OBAMA-BIDEN PLAN TO PROVIDE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE TO ALL

Barack Obama and Joe Biden's plan strengthens employer-based coverage, makes insurance companies accountable and ensures patient choice of doctor and care without government interference. Under the plan, if you like your current health insurance, nothing changes, except your costs will go down by as much as \$2,500 per year. If you don't have health insurance, you will have a choice of new, affordable health insurance options.

LOWER COSTS TO MAKE OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WORK FOR PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES – NOT JUST INSURANCE COMPANIES

Inefficient and poor quality care costs the nation at least \$50 to \$100 billion every year.⁹ Billions more are wasted on administration and overhead because of inefficiencies in the health care system.¹⁰ And given current trends, this problem will only get worse as health care spending is expected to double within the next decade.¹¹

A growing body of research points to substantial opportunities to improve quality while reducing the costs of care. Health care systems in many parts of the country deliver high quality care to the populations they serve at half the cost of other equally renowned academic medical centers in other parts of the country.¹² The key is to provide information, incentives and support to help physicians and others work together to improve quality of care while reducing costs.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we must redesign our health system to reduce inefficiency and waste and improve health care quality, which will drive down costs for families and individuals. The Obama-Biden plan will improve efficiency and lower costs in the health care system by: (1) adopting state-of-the-art health information technology systems; (2) ensuring that patients receive and providers deliver the best possible care, including prevention and chronic disease management services; (3) reforming our market structure to increase competition; and offering federal reinsurance to employers to help ensure that unexpected or catastrophic illnesses do not make health insurance unaffordable or out of reach for businesses and their employees.

(1) INVEST IN ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS. Most medical records are still stored on paper, which makes them difficult to use to coordinate care, measure quality, or reduce medical errors. Processing paper claims also costs twice as much as processing electronic claims.¹³ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will invest \$10 billion a year over the next five years to move the U.S. health care system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems, including electronic health records. They will also phase in requirements for full implementation of health IT and commit the necessary federal resources to make it happen. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that these systems are developed in coordination with providers and frontline workers, including those in rural and underserved areas. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that patients' privacy is protected. A study by the Rand Corporation found that if most hospitals and doctors offices adopted electronic health records, up to \$77 billion of savings would be realized each year through improvements such as reduced hospital stays, avoidance of duplicative and unnecessary testing, more appropriate drug utilization, and other efficiencies.¹⁴

(2) IMPROVE ACCESS TO PREVENTION AND PROVEN DISEASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS. Experts agree that several steps should be taken immediately to help patients get the care they need and to help providers improve medical practice. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand and support these and other efforts to lower costs and improve health outcomes.

HELP PATIENTS

- **Support disease management programs.** Over seventy-five percent of total health care dollars are spent on patients with one or more chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure.¹⁵ Many patients with chronic diseases benefit greatly from disease management programs, which help patients manage their condition and get the care they need.¹⁶ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will require that plans that participate in the new public plan, Medicare or the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) utilize proven disease management programs. This will improve quality of care and lower costs, as well.

- **Coordinate and integrate care.** Rates of chronic diseases have skyrocketed in the last 2 decades.¹⁷ Over 133 million Americans have at least one chronic disease.¹⁸ With proper care, the onset and progression of these diseases can be contained for many years. In addition to the needless suffering and early death they cause, these chronic conditions cost a staggering \$1.7 trillion yearly.¹⁹ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will support providers to put in place care management programs and encourage team care through implementation of medical home type models that will improve coordination and integration of care of those with chronic conditions.
- **Require full transparency regarding quality and costs.** Health care quality and costs can vary tremendously among hospitals and providers; however, patients have limited access to this information.²⁰ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will require hospitals and providers to collect and publicly report measures of health care costs and quality, including data on preventable medical errors, nurse staffing ratios, hospital-acquired infections, and disparities in care and costs. Health plans will be required to disclose the percentage of premiums that actually goes to paying for patient care as opposed to administrative costs.

ENSURE PROVIDERS DELIVER QUALITY CARE

- **Promote patient safety.** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will require providers to report preventable medical errors, and support hospital and physician practice improvement to prevent future errors.
- **Align incentives for excellence.** Both public and private insurers tend to pay providers based on the volume of services provided, rather than the quality or effectiveness of care.²¹ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will accelerate efforts to develop and disseminate best practices, and align reimbursement with provision of high quality health care. Providers who see patients enrolled in the new public plan, the National Health Insurance Exchange, Medicare and FEHB will be rewarded for achieving performance thresholds on physician-validated outcome measures.
- **Comparative effectiveness reviews and research.** One of the keys to eliminating waste and missed opportunities is to increase our investment in comparative effectiveness reviews and research. This information is developed by reviewing existing literature, analyzing electronic health care data, and conducting simple, real world studies of new technologies. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will establish an independent institute to guide reviews and research on comparative effectiveness, so that Americans and their doctors will have accurate and objective information to make the best decisions for their health and well-being.
- **Tackle disparities in health care.** Although all Americans are affected by problems with our health care delivery system, an overwhelming body of evidence demonstrates that certain populations are significantly more likely to receive lower quality health care than others. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will tackle the root causes of health disparities by addressing differences in access to health coverage and promoting prevention and public health, both of which play a major role in addressing disparities. They will also challenge the medical system to eliminate inequities in health care by requiring hospitals and health plans to collect, analyze and report health care quality for disparity populations and holding them accountable for any differences found; diversifying the workforce to ensure culturally effective care; implementing and funding evidence-based interventions, such as patient navigator programs; and supporting and expanding the capacity of safety-net institutions, which provide a disproportionate amount of care for underserved populations with inadequate funding and technical resources.
- **Reform medical malpractice while preserving patient rights.** Increasing medical malpractice insurance rates are making it harder for doctors to practice medicine²² and raising the costs of health care for everyone.²³ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will strengthen antitrust laws to prevent insurers

from overcharging physicians for their malpractice insurance. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also promote new models for addressing physician errors that improve patient safety, strengthen the doctor-patient relationship, and reduce the need for malpractice suits.

(3) LOWER COSTS BY TAKING ON ANTICOMPETITIVE ACTIONS IN THE DRUG AND INSURANCE COMPANIES. It is not right that Americans families are paying skyrocketing premiums while drug and insurance industries are enjoying record profits. These companies benefit most from the status quo and in many cases are the greatest obstacles to reform. The Obama-Biden plan will tackle needless waste and spiraling costs by increasing competition in the insurance and drug markets.

- **Increasing competition in the insurance industry.** The insurance business today is dominated by a small group of large companies that has been gobbling up their rivals. In recent years, for-profit companies have bought up not-for-profit insurers around the country. There have been over 400 health care mergers in the last 10 years and just two companies dominate a full third of the national market.²⁴

These changes were supposed to make the industry more efficient, but instead premiums have skyrocketed, increasing over 87 percent over the past six years.²⁵ Over the same time period, insurance administrative overhead has been the fastest-growing component of health spending. The 2007 Commonwealth Fund Commission on a High Performance Health System reported that between 2000 and 2005, administrative overhead – including both administrative expenses and insurance industry profits – increased 12.0 percent per year, 3.4 percentage points faster than the average health expenditure growth of 8.6 percent.²⁶

And while health care costs continue to rise for families, CEOs of these insurance companies have received multi-million dollar bonuses.²⁷ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will prevent companies from abusing their monopoly power through unjustified price increases. In markets where the insurance business is not competitive, their plan will force insurers to pay out a reasonable share of their premiums for patient care instead of keeping exorbitant amounts for profits and administration. Barack Obama and Joe Biden's new National Health Insurance Exchange will also help increase competition by insurers.

- **Prevent private insurance waste and abuse in Medicare.** Medicare's private plan alternative, called Medicare Advantage, was established to increase competition and reduce costs. But independent reports show that on average the government pays *12 percent more* than it costs to treat comparable beneficiaries through traditional Medicare.²⁸ These excessive subsidies cost the government billions of dollars every year and create an incentive structure that has led to fraudulent abuses of seniors. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we need to eliminate the excessive subsidies to Medicare Advantage plans and pay them the same amount it would cost to treat the same patients under regular Medicare.
- **Allow consumers to import safe drugs from other countries.** The second-fastest growing type of health expenses is prescription drugs.²⁹ Pharmaceutical companies should profit when their research and development results in a groundbreaking new drug. But some companies are exploiting Americans by dramatically overcharging U.S. consumers. These companies are selling the exact same drugs in Europe and Canada but charging Americans a 67 percent premium.³⁰ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will allow Americans to buy their medicines from other developed countries if the drugs are safe and prices are lower outside the U.S.
- **Prevent drug companies from blocking generic drugs from consumers.** Some drug manufacturers are explicitly paying generic drug makers not to enter the market so they can preserve their monopolies and keep charging Americans exorbitant prices for brand name products.³¹ The Obama-Biden plan will work to ensure that market power does not lead to higher prices for consumers. Their plan will work to

increase use of generic drugs in the new public plan, Medicare, Medicaid, FEHBP and prohibit large drug companies from keeping generics out of markets.

- **Allow Medicare to negotiate for cheaper drug prices.** The 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act bans the government from negotiating down the prices of prescription drugs, even though the Department of Veterans Affairs' negotiation of prescription drug prices with drug companies has garnered significant savings for taxpayers.³² Barack Obama and Joe Biden will repeal the ban on direct negotiation with drug companies and use the resulting savings, which could be as high as \$30 billion,³³ to further invest in improving health care coverage and quality.

(4) REDUCE COSTS OF CATASTROPHIC ILLNESSES FOR EMPLOYERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES. Catastrophic health expenditures account for a high percentage of medical expenses for private insurers.³⁴ In fact, the most recent data available reveals that the top five percent of people with the greatest health care expenses in the U.S. account for 49 percent of the overall health care dollar.³⁵ For small businesses, having a single employee with catastrophic expenditures can make insurance unaffordable to all of the workers in the firm. The Obama-Biden plan would reimburse employer health plans for a portion of the catastrophic costs they incur above a threshold if they guarantee such savings are used to reduce the cost of workers' premiums. Offsetting some of the catastrophic costs would make health care more affordable for employers, workers and their families.

AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE COVERAGE OPTIONS FOR ALL

Barack Obama and Joe Biden will guarantee affordable, accessible health care coverage for all Americans. Currently, there are over 45 million Americans lacking health insurance, and millions more are at risk of losing their coverage due to rising costs.³⁶ Rising costs are also a burden on employers, particularly small businesses, which are increasingly unable to provide health insurance coverage for their employees and remain competitive. Nearly two million fewer Americans receive health insurance coverage through their employers now compared to eight years ago,³⁷ and this trend shows no sign of slowing down. It is simply too expensive for individuals and families to buy insurance directly on the open market and impossible for many with pre-existing conditions.

The Obama-Biden plan both builds on and improves our current insurance system, which most Americans continue to rely upon, and leaves Medicare intact for older and disabled Americans. Under the Obama-Biden plan, Americans will be able to maintain their current coverage, have access to new affordable options, and see the quality of their health care improve and their costs go down. The Obama-Biden plan provides new affordable health insurance options by: (1) guaranteeing eligibility for all health insurance plans; (2) creating a National Health Insurance Exchange to help Americans and businesses purchase private health insurance; (3) providing new tax credits to families who can't afford health insurance and to small businesses with a new Small Business Health Tax Credit; (4) requiring all large employers to contribute towards health coverage for their employees or towards the cost of the public plan; (5) requiring all children have health care coverage; (5) expanding eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP programs; and (6) allowing flexibility for state health reform plans.

(1) GUARANTEED ELIGIBILITY. Obama and Biden will require insurance companies to cover pre-existing conditions so all Americans, regardless of their health status or history, can get comprehensive benefits at fair and stable premiums.

(2) NEW AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS. The Obama-Biden plan will create a National Health Insurance Exchange to help individuals purchase new affordable health care options if they are uninsured or want new health insurance. Through the Exchange, any American will have the opportunity to enroll in the new public plan or an approved private plan, and income-based sliding scale tax credits will be

provided for people and families who need it. Insurers would have to issue every applicant a policy and charge fair and stable premiums that will not depend upon health status. The Exchange will require that all the plans offered are at least as generous as the new public plan and meet the same standards for quality and efficiency. Insurers would be required to justify an above-average premium increase to the Exchange. The Exchange would evaluate plans and make the differences among the plans, including cost of services, transparent.

The Exchange will have the following features:

- **Comprehensive benefits.** The benefit package will be similar to that offered through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP), the program through which Members of Congress get their own health care. Plans will include coverage of all essential medical services, including preventive, maternity and mental health care.
- **Affordable premiums, co-pays and deductibles.** Participants will be charged fair premiums and minimal co-pays for deductibles for preventive services.
- **Simplified paperwork.** The plan will simplify paperwork for providers and will increase savings to the system overall.
- **Easy enrollment.** All Exchange health insurance plans will be simple to enroll in and provide ready access to coverage.
- **Portability and choice.** Participants will be able to move from job to job without changing or jeopardizing their health care coverage.
- **Quality and efficiency.** Participating hospitals and providers that participate in the new public plan will be required to collect and report data to ensure that standards for health care quality, health information technology and administration are being met.

(3) TAX CREDITS FOR FAMILIES AND SMALL BUSINESSES. Barack Obama and Joe Biden understand that too many families that do not qualify for public health programs like Medicaid and SCHIP have trouble finding affordable health insurance. They know from talking to small business owners across the nation that the skyrocketing cost of healthcare poses a serious competitive threat to America's small businesses. The Obama-Biden health care plan will provide tax credits to all individuals who need it for their premiums. They will also create a new Small Business Health Tax Credit to provide small businesses with a refundable tax credit of up to 50 percent on premiums paid by small businesses on behalf of their employees. To be eligible for the credit, small businesses will have to offer a quality health plan to all of their employees and cover a meaningful share of the cost of employee health premiums.

(4) EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION. Large employers that do not offer meaningful coverage or make a meaningful contribution to the cost of quality health coverage for their employees will be required to contribute a percentage of payroll toward the costs of the national plan. Small businesses will be exempt from this requirement.

(5) REQUIRE COVERAGE OF CHILDREN. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will require that all children have health care coverage. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand the number of options for young adults to get coverage by allowing young people up to age 25 to continue coverage through their parents' plans.

(6) EXPANSION OF MEDICAID AND SCHIP. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP programs and ensure that these programs continue to serve their critical safety net function.

(7) FLEXIBILITY FOR STATE PLANS. Due to federal inaction, some states have taken the lead in health care reform. Under the Obama-Biden plan, states can continue to experiment, provided they meet the minimum standards of the national plan.

PROMOTING PREVENTION & STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH

Covering the uninsured and modernizing America's health care system are urgent priorities, but they are not enough. This nation is facing a true epidemic of chronic disease. An increasing number of Americans are suffering and dying needlessly from diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma and HIV/AIDS, all of which can be delayed in onset if not prevented entirely. One in 3 Americans—133 million—have a chronic condition, and children are increasingly being affected.³⁸ Five chronic diseases—heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes—cause over two-thirds of all deaths each year.³⁹

In addition to the tremendous human cost, chronic diseases exact a tremendous financial toll on our health care resources. Care for patients with diabetes costs \$130 billion each year alone, and this amount is growing.⁴⁰ Tackling chronic diseases is also straining our public health departments and finances, which are already stretched too thin carrying out traditional public health functions, which include ensuring our water is safe to drink, the air is safe to breathe, and our food is safe to eat.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that protecting and promoting health and wellness in this nation is a shared responsibility among individuals and families, school systems, employers, the medical and public health workforce, and federal and state and local governments. All parties must do their part, as well as collaborate with one another, to create the conditions and opportunities that will allow and encourage Americans to adopt healthy lifestyles.

(1) EMPLOYERS. Reduced workforce productivity from illness and disability represents an additional drain on business. To address employee health, an increasing number of employers are offering worksite health promotion programs, onsite clinical preventive services such as flu vaccinations, nutritious foods in cafeterias and vending machines, and exercise facilities. Equally important, many employers choose insurance plans that cover preventive services for their employees. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that worksite interventions hold tremendous potential to influence health and they will expand and reward these efforts.

(2) SCHOOL SYSTEMS. Childhood obesity is nearly epidemic,⁴¹ particularly among minority populations,⁴² and school systems can play an important role in tackling this issue. For example, only about a quarter of schools adhere to nutritional standards for fat content in school lunches.⁴³ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work with schools to create more healthful environments for children, including assistance with contract policy development for local vendors, grant support for school-based health screening programs and clinical services, increased financial support for physical education, and educational programs for students.

(3) WORKFORCE. Primary care providers and public health practitioners have and will continue to lead efforts to protect and promote the nation's health. Yet, the numbers of both are dwindling,⁴⁴ and the existing workforce is further challenged by inadequate training for new health threats such as bioterrorism and avian flu, antiquated funding and reimbursement mechanisms, and limited access to real-time information and technical support. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand funding—including loan repayment, adequate reimbursement, grants for training curricula, and infrastructure support to improve working conditions—to ensure a strong workforce that will champion prevention and public health activities.

(4) INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES. Preventive care only works if Americans take personal responsibility for their health and make the right decisions in their own lives – if they eat the right foods, stay active, and stop smoking. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that all Americans are empowered to monitor their health by ensuring coverage of essential clinical services in all federally supported health plans, including Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP and the new public plan. Americans also benefit from healthy environments that allow them to pursue healthy choices and behaviors that can help ward off chronic and preventable diseases. Healthy environments include sidewalks, biking paths and walking trails; local grocery stores with fruits and vegetables; restricted advertising for tobacco and alcohol to children; and wellness and educational campaigns. In addition, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will increase funding to expand community based preventive interventions to help Americans make better choices to improve their health.

(5) FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. The federal government and state and local governments play critical roles across the full range of disease prevention and health promotion activities. First, working together, governments at all levels should lead the effort to develop a national and regional strategy for public health and align funding mechanisms to support its implementation. Second, the field of public health would benefit from greater research to optimize organization of the 3,000 health departments in this nation,⁴⁵ collaborative arrangements between levels of government and its private partners, performance and accountability indicators, integrated and interoperable communication networks, and disaster preparedness and response. Third, the government must invest in workforce recruitment as well as modernizing our physical structures, particularly our public health laboratories. And finally, the government must examine its own policies, including agricultural, educational, environmental and health policies, to assess and improve their effect on public health in this nation. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will prioritize all of these activities, to ensure a 21st century public health system and healthy America.

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