

HEALTH CARE REFORM 2009

Health care reform is critically important to Montana women, men, and families. As a coalition, we have reviewed Senator Baucus' Finance Committee Policy Options Documents and we ask his support in protecting vulnerable populations and including vital healthcare services as key elements to reform. As Montana-based organizations, we urge Senator Baucus to consider the following priorities with regard to his constituents and Montana providers:

- I. Guarantee inclusion of complete and comprehensive reproductive health care services including, but not limited to abortion care, contraception, cancer screening, prenatal and maternity care, and testing for and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. These services must be included without prejudice for all individuals seeking care including women, men, and teens.
- II. Provide gender-appropriate health care. Health care in America has long been predicated on the health care needs of men with the incorrect assumption that those health care needs translate directly to the female population. As a result, here in Montana we have had to fight legislative and legal battles to insure that basic health care for women is a covered service under Montana health care plans. These services include prenatal care and delivery, mammograms, contraceptives, and abortion-care for low-income women. Accountable health care reform must be modeled on evidence-based public health policies and service delivery systems and fully evaluated and supported by providers, clinicians, and patient needs.
- III. Guarantee access to healthcare, not just healthcare coverage --- providing health care coverage is not the same as providing health care access. We urge Senator Baucus to consider the following issues regarding access:
 - A. Individuals may seek confidential health care service from non-FQHC trusted providers such as Title X family planning clinics (i.e. Bridger Clinic, Inc.), primary care and reproductive health clinics (i.e. Blue Mountain Clinic), Planned Parenthoods, existing independent Medicaid/CHIP providers, etc. The universe of providers should be as expansive as possible to assure access even in the remotest corners of Montana.
 - B. Promoting health care utilization, particularly primary and preventative care, by exempting or restricting co-payments and deductibles. For low-income populations unaffordable co-payments and high deductibles will act as a deterrent for accessing healthcare.
 - C. Eliminate discriminatory premium rating practices. The reform proposal to eliminate gender as a premium rating factor is a critical improvement to health care access. Montana is one of the few states in the nation with an insurance law that protects women from paying higher premiums for their health insurance coverage and we applaud Senator Baucus for including this reform in his proposal.

Many issues that we as a community of women's health care providers advocate for in Montana are noted in the Senate Finance Committee's policy options documents. The guiding principles of equal and affordable access, comprehensive coverage with a focus on prevention, and non-discrimination are paramount to any system of health care reform.

As experts in reproductive health care and essential community providers, we encourage Senator Baucus to include our community, our patients, and our services in his efforts.

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Interested Parties:

Blue Mountain
Clinic

Bridger Clinic,
Inc.

Planned
Parenthood of
Montana

Montana not-for-profit providers committed to women's health, reproductive health & justice, and providing essential community-based healthcare for Montanans.