

Building Active Unity for Health Care for All:

Statements of Support from Health Care Justice Leaders

Submitted as of June 4, 2008

(list in alphabetical order, see statement text below)

Amy Allina, Director of Programs, National Women's Health Network
Spokesperson for Raising Women's Voices - a joint project of:
Avery Institute for Social Change, MergerWatch Project, National Women's Health Network

Diane Archer, Founder, Medicare Rights Center and Special Counsel, Institute for America's Future

Joel Barkin, Executive Director, Progressive States Network

Jeff Blum, Executive Director, USAction

Flavio Casoy, Health Policy Team Chair, American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-MI), Congress Member from Michigan's 14th District

Robert Crittenden, MD, Executive Director, Herndon Alliance

Richard Davis, RN, Executive Director, Vermont Citizens Campaign for Health

Ken Frisof, MD, practicing physician and founding Chair of UHCAN

Tina Gerardi, MS, RN, CAE, Chief Executive Officer, New York State Nurses Association

Sarita Gupta, Executive Director, Jobs With Justice

Margarida Jorge, Director, Americans for Health Care
A Project of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Richard Kirsch, National Campaign Director, Health Care for America Now! (HCAN)

Steve Kreisberg, Director of Collective Bargaining and Health Care Policy,
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Physicians for a National Health Program

Jean Silver-Isenstadt, MD, PhD, Executive Director, National Physicians Alliance

Jaime Torres, MD, National Coordinator, Latinos for National Health Insurance

Walter Tsou, MD, MPH, former President of the American Public Health Association and
Spokesperson, Health Care for All Philadelphia

Rev. Linda Hanna Walling, Founder and Executive Director, Faithful Reform in Health Care

Judy Waxman, Vice President for Health and Reproductive Rights, National Women's Law Center

** Organizational affiliations included for identification purposes only*

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Visit www.uhcan.org to get involved and help build **active unity**
within our movement and in your community!

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Amy Allina, *Director of Programs, National Women's Health Network*
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Building Active Unity for Health Care for All - Response to the UHCAN Call:

Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need (RWV) is a national collaborative initiative supporting quality, affordable health care for all. We are engaging a broad array of women's health and reproductive justice advocates in local, state and national health reform with a goal of ensuring that women's concerns will be addressed in reform efforts and that the health care we get will truly be health care for all.

RWV supports UHCAN's call to build active unity within the health care justice community. Across the diverse experiences and perspectives represented within that community we share a common understanding of certain fundamental aspects of the health care problems this country faces. It is clear that unchecked market forces have resulted in skyrocketing health care costs, fueled by huge profit margins for insurance and drug companies. This has left women and our families paying more for health care and getting less. RWV is committed to working with our health care justice allies to achieve comprehensive health care reform – reform that makes quality health care affordable to buy and use and that prohibits exclusions from health care because of pre-existing conditions like pregnancy, breast cancer, genetic conditions and other health care problems that women and our family members confront over the course of our lives.

Diane Archer, *Founder, Medicare Rights Center and Special Counsel, Institute for America's Future*

Unity? Count me in! Defending the public Medicare plan has been the center of my professional life, but it was always a piece of ensuring quality affordable care for everyone in America. With private insurers unable to control health care costs, protect us from financial risk and guarantee health security, the entire health care system is falling down. 2008 is the chance we have been waiting for. And, all together is the way to win health care for America now. With a strong unifying movement-building vision, there is no stopping us.

Joel Barkin, *Executive Director, Progressive States Network*

The Progressive States Network appreciates and strongly supports UHCAN's initiative to ensure unity among health care for all advocates. As UHCAN has identified, the need for coordination among advocates is especially pronounced in the interchange between reforms at the state and the national levels. As advances in health care reform most frequently start in the states, the potential for bold and lasting national reform will be emboldened by state reform. This underscores the need for advocates to stay united and recognize our collective goal that all US residents have quality and affordable health care when and where they need it.

Jeff Blum, *Executive Director, USAction*

Creating a health care system that works for all of us must start with the vision that we are all in this together. We shouldn't be working for the health care system. Our health care system should work for all of us. All of us must join together to make sure that the lack of health care is not an obstacle to achieving the American dream. We need to work together to make sure we have a health care system that works for all of us, guaranteeing economic and family security, a fair system that provides opportunity for all. Together we can build a health care system that provides quality, affordable health care for every one of us.

Flavio Casoy, Health Policy Team Chair, American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

The American Medical Student Association (AMSA) has long advocated for quality, affordable health care for everyone. In fact, it was the medical students' strong support for Medicare that led to our separation from the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1968.

Over the years, our members have debated the best approach to ensure that everyone in our country has equitable access to care. AMSA has long supported a single public health insurance program as the best and only evidence-based policy approach to reach our goals.

To achieve comprehensive health care reform, we understand that we must be part of a broad effort to build a base of health justice voters and organizers. The political question before us at this moment is to answer the challenge posed by so-called "free-market" groups led by the private insurance industry to eliminate any role for government in healthcare. Not only does the for-profit special interest oppose a national health insurance program, but they also fight tooth and nail against any government oversight at all. For them, private interests are paramount, even to the detriment of the public's health and the public's treasure.

As the healthcare reform debate in this country heats up once again, all organizations that support any role of government in healthcare must come together and work to ensure that we defeat the profit interests in our system. We must recognize that the policy disagreements between our groups are much smaller than our collective disagreement with the profit-driven special interests in healthcare. As the nation's future physicians, as colleagues, and as comrades, we invite all health professional, student, labor, community, faith, small-business, civil rights, and other organizations to stand together in the face of fierce attacks to our goals of quality, affordable healthcare for all.

U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-MI), Congress Member from Michigan's 14th District

Statement in response to UHCAN's Open Letter:

Health care reform is coming in America. I am very proud of my years of work on health care, including H Con Res 99, and my sponsorship of HR 676. But I deeply believe that the health care legislation I work on in 2009 will be the most exciting and important bill of my career. It will be more than life saving. It will have a global dimension. Other countries will be watching what we do.

It won't be easy. We will need much more active support than exists now. We need to expand the people we are talking to, to make sure we are not always talking to ourselves. I am doing that in Congress and hope that everybody does it where they are. 2008 really is the year to work together and learn from each other. Many people and groups have good ideas that can help us get the health care America deserves. Working together, we will win. We have long been on the right side. If we are united, we will be on the winning side as well.

Robert Crittenden, MD, Executive Director, Herndon Alliance

UHCAN's position in support of building consistency and unity among advocates working for health care for all is an essential and wise one. To move health reform forward will take heavy lifting, and a strong, coherent and cohesive reform voice.

Richard Davis, RN, Executive Director, Vermont Citizens Campaign for Health

Vermont has long been considered on the forefront of health care reform. What health care activists in Vermont have accomplished is modest, but our successes reflect that we have finally figured out that we must not be polarized by our differences and that we must come together and work toward common goals.

Some of us are single payer supporters, others are incrementalists and some will simply take whatever they can get. The key is that we all remain at the table in a world that relies on the political process for health care reform.

Many of us in Vermont agonized over pushing our own agendas. The majority of health care reform organizations unified our message, guided by principles that we feel will lead us to a time when all of us have a basic level of health care that all of us, individually and as a society, can afford.

UHCAN's call for collaboration around a set of principles is so important because people are suffering and dying while we try to figure out the best political strategy. It is time to come together to figure out a way to stop the market-driven storm troopers and the profit-driven bean counters in the pharmaceutical and health insurance industries.

Ken Frisof, MD, practicing physician and founding Chair of UHCAN

Since its birth, UHCAN has been a home for tolerance and diversity in the health care justice movement. UHCAN's statement encouraging support for active unity couldn't come at a better time. A window of political opportunity has reopened for the first time in a decade in the past few years and will open wider with a new administration in Washington. To take advantage of this opening window, we must utilize a multi-faceted approach - both state and national, both politics and policy, both financing and delivery. The struggle to obtain justice in health care can become a leading edge in the forthcoming battles over core issues in economic justice. But for that to happen, we must lead with our values and our principles. We must be solid on the ends, flexible on the means.

Tina Gerardi, MS, RN, CAE, Chief Executive Officer, New York State Nurses Association

Statement of Support for Universal Health Care Action Network's Call for Unity:

The New York State Nurses Association is the largest professional association and union for registered nurses in the state. A key part of our mission is to protect the public's health by providing leadership in the fight for comprehensive health care reform. We support the Universal Health Care Action Network's (UHCAN) approach to reform that calls for building unity in the health care justice movement.

Firmly upholding the principle that health care is a right – not a privilege, the Nurses Association is concerned about the disparities and gaps in access to health care that exist in New York's current market-based system. Because New Yorkers – and all Americans – living within this flawed system are at risk, it is time to put any differences aside and build common ground within the health care justice movement.

Though as health care advocates from diverse organizations we may embrace different policy approaches and strategies, the New York State Nurses Association supports UHCAN's call for unity, as we must stand together for the common goal of bringing quality, affordable health care to all people.

For more information, contact Governmental Affairs at 518.782.9400 ext. 283 or by e-mail at legislative@nysna.org

Sarita Gupta, Executive Director, Jobs With Justice

As a National Network committed to bringing labor unions, community organizations, faith and student activists together to fight for the rights of workers, we understand the importance of building unity among a broad and diverse constituency to achieve a greater goal. The fight for health care reform has been central demand of Jobs with Justice since its founding. The need to reform our current health care system has never been greater. And the political conditions are such that we have the opportunity to win real health care reform. We look forward to mobilizing the Jobs With Justice network in alliance with a broader movement for health care reform. We must seize the moment!

Therefore Jobs With Justice agrees to sign on to the open letter On the Road Together In 2008-2009: Building Active Unity for Health Care for All.

**Margarida Jorge, Director, Americans for Health Care
A Project of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**

SEIU's Americans for Health Care Campaign is committed to the principle of shared responsibility as a key pillar of comprehensive health care reform. For years, we have worked with UHCAN in the states to build urgency for reform, to mobilize health care voters, and to cultivate the political will for change because we know that the longer we wait to fix the health care crisis, the worse it's going to get for families across the country. Like UHCAN, we recognize that it's going to take all of us, working together, to win a mandate for guaranteed access to quality, affordable health care for all in 2008 and to hold our political leaders accountable for change in 2009.

Richard Kirsch, National Campaign Director, Health Care for America Now! (HCAN)

Health Care for America Now! is pleased to join in the Universal Health Care Action Network's call for unity around quality, affordable, health care for all. The Health Care for America Now! mission statement mirrors the sentiments in your letter including the moral, medical, economic and political imperatives as well as highlighting the importance of a strong government role in health care reform including a national public plan. We believe that there exists an inherent ideological divide between people who believe in continuing to rely on health insurance companies and those who believe in true quality, affordable, health care for all. We look forward to actively working with all who agree with our mission statement in achieving this goal.

**Steve Kreisberg, Director of Collective Bargaining and Health Care Policy,
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)**

Creation of a health care system that provides everyone in America with consistent access to high quality care in a financially sustainable manner is a goal to which all members of our society should aspire. Yet with fully one-sixth of our economy devoted to health care, vested interests will continue to distort and mischaracterize the basis of our problems and the effectiveness of alternative solutions. It is essential that we remain united and allegiant to our overarching goal and consider alternative reform ideas on the basis of their relative merits and not through an ideological filter. Unity, above all else, demands an acceptance of divergent views as we work for the common good. All of us share the responsibility to reform health care in America and by working together, we will.

***Ted Marmor, author of Fads, Fallacies & Foolishness in Medical Care Management & Policy (2007);
The Politics of Medicare (1973; 2000)***

UHCAN's emphasis on finding common ground among progressive health activists is welcome, valuable, and much to be celebrated. Unless those outside of government press for the principles both the IOM and UHCAN has articulated, the forces of stalemate and obfuscation will win out. We need the Congress that will embrace these goals and a President that will press for them. The lessons of American health reform are many, but the key one is that this is not an area where market forces can be relied upon to produce acceptable results. You have my support.

Don McCanne, MD, Senior Health Policy Fellow, Physicians for a National Health Program

Unity

Health care inequities that impair access and cause financial hardship have gone on far too long. It is time for unity. It is time for us to unite together in support of health policies that would ensure that every individual would have access to reasonably comprehensive health care services in an equitably funded system that is affordable for each and every individual and affordable for society. Trading away these principles would divide us, but by uniting behind them, we can finally get the job done.

***David McLanahan, MD, Coordinator, Western Washington Chapter of
Physicians for a National Health Program***

We in the Western Washington Chapter of PNHP are committed to unite with other health justice groups in the common effort to build the grass roots strength and political power necessary to establish a health care system consistent with the Institute of Medicine's principles for a high performing, equitable health care system. We believe unity is critical for us to refute the value of the market in health care and replace it with the value of health care for all. We believe we can replace "everyone for one" with "all for one, one for all."

Jean Silver-Isenstadt, MD, PhD, Executive Director, National Physicians Alliance

The health care "system" in America is sick and the time for change is long overdue. The National Physicians Alliance supports guaranteed, quality, affordable health care for all Americans. The 2008 election may open a window of opportunity like-minded groups to make real progress toward this goal. Allied stakeholders must work together now to develop a common understanding and strategy for action. Without common purpose, we will not succeed.

Jaime Torres, MD, National Coordinator, Latinos for National Health Insurance

Latinos must move from the sidelines to the table as we seek solutions to this crisis. The elimination of segregation and unequal access should take utmost priority. The solution, we believe, is in a national health insurance system--publicly financed, privately delivered--where EVERYONE is covered. Lets us all work for affordable, quality healthcare for all not based on market forces but patient centered care.

Walter Tsou, MD, MPH, former President of the American Public Health Association and Spokesperson, Health Care for All Philadelphia

As a long term health care advocate, I recognize that our mutual struggle for quality, affordable health care for everyone is the civil rights struggle of the 21st century. So I join UHCAN in its call for active unity around some fundamental steps. These include expanding public programs and pointing out the failures of market based private health insurance. We should unify around stronger insurance regulation and remove profit incentives which leaves the poor, the sick and the infirmed without decent health care. We need to keep our eye on the goal: single payer public financing and a competitive, private health care delivery system which should be the envy of the world.

Rev. Linda Hanna Walling, Founder and Executive Director, Faithful Reform in Health Care

It clearly will take all of us working together around shared values to build a health care future that works well for everyone. For too long we have divided ourselves over “may the best plan win.” It’s time to move forward *together*, to raise our vision and voices for a health system focused on the common good. In such a vision, we will celebrate who we are as children of God, exhibit compassion for those who are poor or vulnerable, and embrace the equitable sharing of our abundant health care resources.

Judy Waxman, Vice President for Health and Reproductive Rights, National Women’s Law Center

Once again the time has come for collective action to achieve quality, affordable, comprehensive health care for all. But the painful lessons of our last effort of the early 90’s loom large; we risk the same outcome - or worse - unless we heed those lessons. Our opponents who support the status quo and worse are stronger than ever. They are ready to fight our collective efforts- but they may not have to put up a fight if they just have to stand by and watch as we disagree among ourselves as to the best way to achieve change. Make no mistake – we must present a unified front if we have any hope of helping the millions of people in this country who can not wait any longer for real change in our health care. We must work together – to seize the political opportunity and demand change - or face the same fate as our last attempt.

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