



Health as a Human Right

Promoting Equal Access to Quality, Comprehensive Health Care for All

This memo provides advice on talking broadly about creating a health care system that works for everyone. Outlined here are some basic principles that support an accessible, equitable system that provides quality care and affords people the opportunity to live the healthiest life possible.

To build support for such a system, we recommend that communications about health care:

- Promote **cooperative** solutions and invoke narratives that recall successes we have achieved together;
- Emphasize **community over consumerism**. Health care is typically framed as a consumer good that each of us must purchase at market rates. That frame reinforces a competitive, individualistic mindset, suggesting that people who lack quality health care are simply poor economic competitors.
- Use **opportunity** as entry point for racial equity, immigrant integration; and
- Illuminate how health care is one of our **basic human rights**.

Public Opinion

Now is the time to start talking about health as a human right, not an individual responsibility or a consumer choice. The public overwhelmingly agrees that health, at some level, is a right. Our job, then, should be to continue to expand their definition of what kind of health care and what level of health maintenance rates as a right. The current numbers are striking, though. Recent studies show that:

- Nationally, 89% of Americans believe that access to health care is a human right, 77% believe that the government has a responsibility to guarantee access for everyone.
- Regionally, 89 % of New Yorkers believe that health care should be a right for all New Yorkers. And, nearly 70% believe that government (federal, 41%; state and local, 28%) should be “mainly responsible for ensuring that everyone in New York gets the health care that they need.”
- Similarly, over 90% of Connecticut residents say that everyone in Connecticut deserves a right to health care.
- After the second presidential debate in October, Alternet reported of Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama that in a CNN focus group, “when Obama discussed health care as a right for all Americans, his numbers were through the roof. At one point, female respondents were dialing in at 100 percent approval.”

Approaching health as a human right is powerful because it reflects our values, and the values of the American public. It is also preferable to using a consumer approach because doing so suggests that care is a good that each of us must purchase at market rates. This message reinforces a competitive mindset, and implies that people without health care are just poor economic competitors. Building an audience for equal access to health care requires portraying care as a common resource that’s stronger when we’re all in it together, and as a system that is our right to expect and demand.

The Values

We recommend that communications around healthcare equity emphasize the values of **opportunity, community, security, equality and human rights**.

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The Message: Health Care is a Human Right

One way to stay “on message” is to communicate in terms of **Value, Problem, Solution, and Action:**

Value The promise of opportunity in America means that access to health care shouldn’t depend on what you look like, what neighborhood you live in, or how much money you make. And receiving the health care we need is not just a good idea, it’s a basic human right.

Problem But we’re falling short of that promise when 47 million Americans don’t have access to health-preserving and life-saving care. These Americans can’t fully receive or contribute to the benefits of society, and that violates our values.

Solution We need a health care system that works for all Americans whatever their race or income or neighborhood.

Action Support a health care opportunity plan for our state that will bring quality care to all.

Talking Health and Values

- Health care is a basic human right. Without care, health is jeopardized. Without health, people can’t support their families or contribute fully to our society. We need a health care system that works for everyone.
- Health is central to opportunity. Too frequently, the losses in time, money and ultimately, health caused by the inequalities and problems in our current system threaten our economic security. To realize America’s true potential, we need to do everything possible to support the health of everyone here.
- When it comes to healthcare, it doesn’t make sense to expect people to “go it alone”. We’re all in it together and threats to individual health quickly become national challenges. By coming together to support the development of healthy communities – with good food choices, clean drinking water, plenty of parks and open space –we’ll create a healthier nation.

Talking About a Comprehensive Health Care System

- Quality health care means comprehensive care that offers everyone the services they need. Reproductive services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and other too often neglected services are central to healthy communities.
- Our history shows that we’re stronger when we address tough issues collectively. When communities, states and the nation have worked together to ensure clean and healthy drinking water, provide child immunizations or reduce smoking, we have all benefited.
- When health care resources are distributed evenly and fairly across a large population, everyone gets the care they need before health problems become costly and more difficult to treat. This notion of pooling resources and spreading risk is central to all forms of social insurance and is particularly important in health care.

Talking About Health Disparities

- We must address and remove obstacles and biases based on income, race, gender and other aspects of who we are. There is ample evidence that people of color and those in low-income areas don’t have the same access to quality health care as others. It’s only sensible, fair and right that we fix this.
- Research reveals systematic barriers to good health care for people of color. These have developed over years because neighborhoods have been historically disconnected from many opportunities, including quality health care services. We can’t allow those barriers to health care to remain and must push for a system that provides needed resources in every community.

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