

Health Task Force

Chair: Rep. Ciro D. Rodriguez (D-TX)

Uninsured

Latinos are a medically underserved population. In 1999, 44% of low-income Hispanics lacked health insurance. Overall, 1 in 3 Hispanics are uninsured. The Caucus will work to make health insurance available and affordable for everyone, especially the most vulnerable populations. The Caucus supports the extension of current Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) services, and the implementation and enforcement of Culturally Competency/Limited English Proficiency Standards:

Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):

- ! Extend Medicaid eligibility to uninsured parents of children who are enrolled in SCHIP.
- ! Advocate for States' rights to extend and/or restore SCHIP/Medicaid eligibility to legal immigrant children and pregnant mothers.
- ! Advocate at the national level for States to set at the federal poverty level for SCHIP's eligibility level up to 200%.
- ! Outreach to those eligible for services, but not yet enrolled.
- ! Address SCHIP's eligibility problems in instances where children migrate between states.
- ! Support Legislation to remove or increase the Medicaid cap for territories.
- ! Encourage states with high concentration of immigrant populations in border areas to equally reimburse health care providers.

Cultural Competency/Limited English Proficiency Standards:

- ! Implement Cultural Competency Standards & Limited English Proficiency Standards in the health care community.
- ! Support programs for training & hiring of Hispanic health professionals who are familiar with CC & LEP Standards.
- ! Ensure that outreach programs are conducted in a culturally competent and linguistically appropriate manner.

Health Disparities

Hispanics and other minorities continue to be disproportionately affected in many health areas including: HIV/AIDS, diabetes, cancer, and other diseases and illnesses such as mental health. The Caucus supports programs and advocates funding initiatives to address these disparities such as the Communities of Color HIV/AIDS Initiative and Diabetes research and outreach.

- ! Monitor the implementation of NIH's Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities.
- ! Support initiatives to increase data collection and research on minority health issues.
- ! Advocate for culturally competent education, prevention and treatment programs.

HIV/AIDS

- ! Support the Communities of Color HIV/AIDS Initiative.
- ! Support increase in funding for efforts to reduce the high HIV/AIDS incidence in racial and ethnic minority communities.
- ! Address ways to decrease the rate of TB and Hepatitis C infections among Latino HIV/AIDS patients.
- ! Encourage international HIV/AIDS organizations to expand efforts in Latin America.
- ! Support increase in funding to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP).
- ! Encourage inter-agency coordination and communication

Diabetes

- ! Advocate for additional funding for diabetes education and prevention efforts in Hispanic communities.
- ! Work to increase Hispanics access to diabetes health care services.
- ! Support efforts to increase data collection and research on the occurrence of Type II Diabetes among Hispanic children.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

The lack of access to culturally competent treatment, the practice of criminalizing the mentally ill, high levels of stigma, and often stressful living conditions lead to increased mental illness and substance abuse among the Hispanic community. Mental health and substance abuse disproportionately affects the Hispanic community and the Caucus supports efforts to educate Americans on the need for quality, affordable mental health care.

- ! Engage in activities to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness and substance abuse in the Hispanic community through education programs.
- ! Support the development of culturally competent treatment programs.
- ! Advocate for increased access to prevention and treatment programs.
- ! Encourage research on the effects of criminalizing the mentally ill.
- ! Support programs to reduce the number of Latina adolescent suicides.

Managed Care Reform

The CHC will continue to push for meaningful health coverage and protections for Americans who are part of a managed care plan. Of the 66% of Hispanics who do have health insurance, two thirds are enrolled in managed care and therefore have limited health provider options and limited treatment options. For many Hispanics, as well as other populations with limited English proficiency, the language barrier transforms the daunting task of negotiating managed care into an even more difficult task. Managed care plans may be less likely to provide treatment for diagnoses that affect minority communities, such as substance abuse. Among Hispanics, there is a pattern of lower satisfaction ratings for managed care plans. Therefore, the CHC must support legislation that addresses the following:

Patients Bill of Rights

- ! Support legislation that facilitates access to emergency care for all people, ensures the privacy/confidentiality of all patients' records, and includes measures of accountability for health care providers to monitor adequate services to minorities.

Access to Specialists

- ! Raise awareness of health care needs of minority communities not being addressed by managed care, including access to specialists. For instance, minority communities that suffer disproportionately from diabetes and cancers must have access to the appropriate medical treatment.

Medicare Reform

Initiatives to reform Medicare must be sensitive to the needs of health providers that service poor and rural areas. Democrats must continue to protect the goals of Medicare and extend services so that those it is intended to reach are adequately serviced.

- ! Make Medicare services more competitive and efficient and extend the life of the Medicare Trust Fund.
- ! Modernize our Medicare health care coverage and add prescription drug coverage for all plans and not limit to Medicare HMOs.
- ! Support the expansion of eligibility to adults younger than 65 years old.
- ! Advocate for Medicare reimbursements to health care providers in all territories at a rate similar to that enjoyed by health providers in the states.

Nutrition

- ! Support the Women and Infant Children Program.
- ! Address the growing problem of obesity in the Hispanic Community.
- ! Target increases in funding to address prevention, research, and service initiatives for Diabetes.
- ! Support the restoration of food stamp benefits for Legal Immigrants.

Aging

- ! Increase services for the elderly poor in Hispanic communities.
- ! Encourage research on how Hispanics fare in nursing homes.
- ! Support initiatives to improve home health services.