



## COMMON PRINCIPLES FOR HEALTHCARE REFORM

**Background:** The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) and United Jewish Communities (UJC) have long been proponents of reform that will serve to strengthen our nation's health care system. Our advocacy efforts have been propelled by both a moral mandate from our Jewish tradition, and our experience providing healthcare services to millions of vulnerable people across the United States. Our partnership on this issue underscores the fact that health reform represents an opportunity to make common-sense improvements that will enhance the ability of social service providers to assist vulnerable populations and simultaneously ensure that the Jewish obligation to "pursue justice" is manifested in public policy outcomes that promote healthcare for all. We therefore emphasize the following shared principles for healthcare reform.

- **Universal Access to Health Services:** Judaism teaches: "whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved an entire world." (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:1,22a). Our revered sage Maimonides (1135-1204) put healthcare first at the top of his priority list of the ten most important services a government should offer its residents. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV:23). Yet in 2009, over 46 million Americans lack access to health care and every year 22,000 people in the United States die prematurely simply because they could not access the health services they needed. *Any healthcare reform should ensure that every individual and family has access to a doctor, and qualified providers for their care regardless of income or other barriers.*
- **Caring for the most vulnerable:** Healthcare reform should strengthen and enhance Medicaid coverage to serve all low-income people. More than 1/3 of the uninsured live beneath the federal poverty line, and Medicaid is the best option to serve this population as it protects low-income families from unaffordable out-of-pocket costs, and is designed to cover the unique healthcare needs of vulnerable populations who require comprehensive care. Expanding and strengthening Medicaid should be a critical part of healthcare reform.
- **Incorporating long-term services and supports:** For enhanced health care access to be a true success, long-term services and supports that include delivery of high quality, affordable and accessible care should be incorporated into reform efforts. These services and supports will lead to a more comprehensive continuum of care that will be able to meet the influx of Baby Boomers who will need supportive services as they age.
- **Choice and Affordability:** Healthcare reform should preserve and expand the choices available to healthcare consumers. Individuals and families should be able to choose their doctors & health providers, as well as select from a wide range health care plans, including choice of a *public option such as one modeled on the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) which every member of Congress and their families has the means to access.* Health reform must also be made more affordable, putting the



government on a more sustainable fiscal path, and bringing costs down for families and individuals.

- **Equity:** Healthcare reform should end unfair insurance practices that allow companies to discriminate based on pre-existing conditions. It should also address entrenched disparities in access, treatment, research and resources in race, gender, ethnicity, language and geographically-underserved communities.
- **Comprehensive Care:** Healthcare reform should put forth a standard for health benefits that offers comprehensive coverage, including all medically necessary treatments when people are ill, but also preventive care that will strive to promote wellness in individuals and their families.

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