



Nonprofit Publisher
of Consumer Reports

January 20, 2012

Via Fax: (916) 324-0283

The Honorable Elaine K. Alquist
Senate Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 4203
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Outlook for Health Care Reform

Dear Senator Alquist:

Thank you for holding these series of health care hearing in an effort to gauge the status of California's health care system and discuss efficient ways to improve services. As you know, Consumers Union has been deeply involved in health care reform efforts in California as well as at the national level for many years.

Consumers Union has developed health care reform principles that we would like to share with the committee.

Consumers Union Health Care Reform Principles

As state and federal proposals come up for serious debate, here are some criteria by which Consumers Union will judge them:

Guaranteed coverage. Private insurance and public programs, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, must be expanded to guarantee that everyone is covered from cradle to grave, regardless of health status or ability to pay. Coverage should include all necessary medical services and leave no one in fear of delayed or denied treatment.

Fair financing. No family should face financial ruin to pay for health care. Costs should be spread fairly among government, employers, and consumers. Coverage must be affordable for individuals based on ability to pay.

Safer care. Millions of Americans are harmed each year by the care they receive. Improved safety systems would save lives and billions of health-system dollars.

Better care. All too often, health-care decisions are based on financial incentives, not science. Comprehensive, easy-to-understand public information about the safety, cost, and quality of care by doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes would help consumers and employers choose the best care. Electronic medical records should be deployed, with strict privacy protections, to gather treatment results and to help consumers manage their care.

Prevention. Smoking- and obesity-related illnesses such as certain cancers, heart disease, and diabetes threaten to overwhelm health expenditures. The primary-care physicians whose job it is to prevent and control those conditions are the most poorly paid of all doctors. Reforms should give patients and doctors more support for avoiding bad habits before they lead to costly illnesses.

Consumers Union looks forward to working with you to improve California's health care system for all Californians.

Sincerely,

Laurie Sobel
Senior Staff Attorney
Consumers Union

cc: Members of the Senate Health Committee; Consultants for the Senate Health Committee