



STATEMENT OF POLICY

Promote Universal Affordable Health Care

Mission: The mission of NYSPHA is to promote and protect the public's health through professional development, networking, advocacy, and education.

Vision: Strengthening public health and taking action to make New York the healthiest state.

Problem Statement

Health inequities are persistent in New York State and are a major threat to public health. One major reason for persistent health inequities is that too many New Yorkers lack health insurance or are underinsured. Many people cannot afford healthcare insurance and do not receive adequate healthcare. Compared with other industrialized countries, New Yorkers pay significantly more for healthcare insurance, partly due to much higher administrative costs, and have poorer health outcomes. The current health care system is inefficient and medical bankruptcies are far too common. Doctors and hospitals devote an inordinate amount of time and resources responding to the myriad of health plans in the marketplace. For many health care consumers, access to affordable care depends upon behind-the-scenes contracting between health care providers and private health insurance companies. New York's private health care market is dominated by a handful of powerful non-profit health care systems even as their size and practices have raised concerns about cost and competition. Healthcare inequities are greater for disadvantaged groups and low-income families are frequently burdened with high deductibles and forego healthcare. Racial and ethnic groups face multiple health disparities, resulting in higher outcomes of asthma, heart disease, diabetes and premature death. People without health insurance, by necessity, delay health care and are often diagnosed at later stages of disease, resulting in higher morbidity and mortality. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the precarious position for those tied to employer insurance, as millions lost their coverage during the resulting economic downturn.

Policy Statement

The New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) advocates for health equity through promoting efforts to ensure affordable healthcare for all ("universal health care"). We encourage partners in the health system to act separately and together to ensure this goal.

As part of the work to address universal health care, NYSPHA specifically promotes the transformation of the public health system through advocacy, education, professional development and networking, and encourages itself and its public health partners in proposing a number of principles that are central to a more equitable health care system:

1. Healthcare for all is a right, not a privilege.
2. Healthcare services should be expanded to include those not currently being served.
3. Healthcare coverage for all needed medical and behavioral health services must be guaranteed, including preventative, diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services. Behavioral, reproductive, and long-term care must be included as should oral health care, which is increasingly recognized as an essential component of comprehensive healthcare.
4. Healthcare financing should be through a progressive income-based fee system. Care must not be rationed by income, including impediments to care such as unaffordable deductibles or co-pays. There are multiple ways to accomplish universal, affordable, comprehensive health care, including single payer (as in Canada), a government run system (as in Britain or the VA in the US), a hybrid system (as in France), or a tightly regulated private system (as in Germany).
5. Healthcare mechanisms to ensure fair payment to providers and appropriate use by consumers must be included. By reducing administrative and insurance costs, a greater share of healthcare spending can be directed to care. Sustained support should be provided for those displaced from employment in healthcare administration and the insurance industry as a result of reduced overhead costs.
6. Healthcare savings can be obtained through bargaining with pharmaceutical and medical device companies.

Justification

Universal healthcare is a right not a privilege. New York State is committed to increasing the number of insured people by offering low cost, health insurance and access to affordable, quality healthcare. This will reduce the overall cost of health services and result in improved health for all New Yorkers (New York State Department of Health Strategic Plan, 2018). New York State is a leader in expanding healthcare coverage through the New York State of Health Marketplace and since its implementation in 2013, there has been a steady decline in uninsured individuals. New York as a whole has seen a decline in uninsured individuals across all age groups, and overall the percentage of New Yorkers who are uninsured: 5.4 %, is better than the national average, 8.9% (Greater New York Hospital Association, 2019). However, just over one million New Yorkers still do not have health coverage (Hammond, 2019).

The United States stands alone in the industrialized world in not having a universal healthcare system. The right to health and accessible healthcare has been recognized internationally and is included in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2021). There are multiple historic factors that have opposed a universal system, including resistance from the insurance and drug companies, past opposition by influential labor and medical groups, and a cultural belief system that equated universal healthcare with socialism (Physicians for a National Health Program, 2021). The current system is characterized by higher costs and lower outcomes than other industrial countries, as well as over 28 million uninsured and millions more underinsured (Woolhandler & Himmelstein, 2017). Inequities faced by marginalized groups are commonplace, affecting people by race, gender, sexuality, class, immigration status and homelessness (Tolbert & Orgera, 2020).

Universal, affordable healthcare, like clean air and water and quality education is one of the hallmarks of an exceptional society. NYSPHA, as a thought leader and advocate for public health in New York State, is committed to educating and advocating for a universal, affordable healthcare system. This includes identifying the problems with the current system and taking an active role in efforts to enact a universal system.

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Record of Action

8/11/21 – Adopted by the NYSPHA Policy and Advocacy Committee (PAC)

8/25/21 – Approved by NYSPHA Board of Directors