



Our Health Care System Is Failing Too Many Women

Marcia D. Greenberger, Co-President, National Women's Law Center, July 8, 2008

Since 1972, the National Women's Law Center has worked on behalf of women and their families on their core concerns. None is more important than ensuring that comprehensive, quality care is universally available to women and their families. No one has a greater stake in this fundamental priority than women. In their roles as health care consumers, as family health care decision makers, and as caregivers — both paid and unpaid — women bear the brunt of our country's health care crisis.

Our current health care system fails to meet the basic needs of far too many women — and low-income women and women of color are especially at risk. Overall, 18 percent of women are uninsured. Almost a quarter of African American women lack health insurance. More than one-third of Latinas are uninsured.

For those who have health insurance, women are more likely than men to have health coverage which has too many gaps and leaves them at great financial risk — 1 in 4 women says that she is unable to pay her medical bills. The high cost of care means women are more likely than men to delay or go without needed health care.

These facts are distressing, to say the least. And yet they cannot possibly begin to convey the personal stories of the many women who are forced to make impossible choices: between buying their prescription drugs or putting food on their family's table, between staying with an abusive spouse or losing health insurance, between losing their home or losing their battle with cancer. No one should have to make such choices.

Simply put: the situation has to change, and now. And while a few states are starting to take commendable steps toward reform, those piecemeal changes are simply not enough. Comprehensive reform — reform that addresses the many challenges of our health care system and guarantees accessible, affordable, quality health care — will greatly enhance the health, the work, and financial well-being of women and their families.

Once again, we are faced with an election that presents a historic opportunity for all of us to ensure that our next President and our next Congress make health care reform a top priority. To succeed we must be ready and join together to demand change from all our elected leaders.

The National Women's Law Center is dedicated to empowering women to be active participants in the fight for health reform, and to join with others in this fight for our lives. That is why we are proud members of Health Care for America Now. This growing coalition presents the opportunity for many different organizations with diverse agendas to come together and combine our collective efforts to change health reform from something we talk about to something that finally happens.

The women of this country know that they and their families can accept no less.