

## Historic Health Reform Bills Moving Through Congress

Congress took significant steps in November towards a broad overhaul of healthcare regulations that would provide stable and affordable coverage for millions of uninsured Americans. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, the House passed the *Affordable Health Care for Americans Act of 2009* (H.R. 3962) by a vote of 220-215. Then on November 21<sup>st</sup>, the Senate voted 60-39 to move their health reform bill to the floor for debate when they return from Thanksgiving break on November 30<sup>th</sup>. The floor debate is expected to last most of December.

Both bills would make many critical changes to our health system to expand coverage to more Americans and provide more affordable health insurance. Major provisions include:

- Expanding Medicaid—the Senate bill expands coverage to families who earn up to 133% of the Federal poverty level and the House bill to families who earn up to 150% of the Federal poverty level
- Creating a health insurance exchange through which individuals and small employers can purchase health coverage
- Providing subsidies to help families who earn up to 400% of the Federal poverty level buy either private insurance or coverage under a new government-run plan
- Developing a national prevention and public health strategy and eliminating co-pays and deductibles for recommended preventive care to help Americans live healthy lives and restrain the growth of healthcare costs over time
- Investing in our healthcare workforce to address shortages in primary care providers and create incentives for providers to serve in underserved areas.

However, the House and Senate health reform bills differ in several important ways, for example:

- The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the House bill would spend a gross total of \$1.05 trillion to extend coverage to 36 million Americans and reduce the deficit by \$138 billion over 10 years. The Senate bill would spend a gross total of \$848 billion to

- extend coverage to 31 million Americans and reduce the deficit by \$130 billion over 10 years.
- Both the House and Senate bills create a nationwide public insurance option, but the Senate bill would allow states to opt-out.
- The House bill repeals CHIP and requires CHIP beneficiaries who are not eligible for Medicaid to obtain coverage through the health insurance exchange beginning in 2014. The Senate bill maintains CHIP and gives states a 23% increase in the CHIP matching rate from fiscal year 2014 to 2019.
- Major coverage provisions in the House bill would go into effect in 2013 and in the Senate bill in 2014.

Advocates are pushing the Senate to approve a health reform bill by the end of the year. Leadership in the House and Senate would then need to reconcile the House- and Senate-passed bills through negotiations into a compromised bill for each chamber to vote on.

FamiliesUSA has many excellent resources for information and ways to take action at [www.familiesusa.org](http://www.familiesusa.org). Other websites for more information include Healthcare for American Now at [www.healthcareforamericanow.org](http://www.healthcareforamericanow.org) and the Kaiser Family Foundation at <http://healthreform.kff.org/>.

## A Great Day for South LA: MLK Set to Re-open in Late 2012!

On November 19, 2009, the Board of Regents for the University of California voted unanimously to partner with the County of Los Angeles in their efforts to re-open Martin Luther King, Jr. Hospital. This marks a long-awaited day for South LA residents, who have been forced to live without adequate access to medical services since the closure of King Hospital in August 2007.

Discussion prior to the UC Regents' vote centered around the viability and sustainability of the partnership. The LA County Board of Supervisors committed to \$500 million for operations, capital improvements, and other resources, while the UC Regents took responsibility for physician staffing of the facility. In addition to the County's financial contribution, the Chan Soon-Shiong Family Foundation recently announced a guarantee of \$100

million to underwrite the County's pursuit of a line of credit, to be used only as an additional financial safeguard.

The new facility would be governed by a seven-member Board, with two members appointed by the County, two members appointed by the UC Regents, and three members jointly appointed by both entities. According to the approved plan, the Hospital is scheduled to open in late 2012 as a private, not-for-profit hospital with a capacity of 120 beds.

The re-opening of the Hospital will provide critical emergency services, help alleviate patient-overflow of surrounding facilities and begin to address the high rates of health disparities in South Los Angeles. The University of California expressed their hope that the new facility would be a national model of a successful community hospital with integrated, quality care.

As the partnership moves forward, the Coalition for Health and Justice remains committed to monitoring these developments to ensure a successful facility with accessible, high-quality care for all. For more information, contact Laura Ewing, Policy Analyst, at 323.295.9372 x246 or [Laura@chc-inc.org](mailto:Laura@chc-inc.org).

## **Supervisors Sour on Sunset of Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Sponsorship**

At their meeting on November 17<sup>th</sup>, LA County Supervisors approved a motion that would encourage greater access to nutrition, physical activity, and smoking prevention and cessation. However, they put aside a provision in the motion to phase out sugar-sweetened beverage company sponsorships, availability, and advertising at County facilities and events by December 2011.

In an effort to support healthful choices through initiatives promoted by the LA County Department of Public Health, Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Mike Antonovich authored the health and wellness motion. After hearing testimony from public health advocates in favor of the motion, from the beverage industry opposed and lengthy discussion on the sugar-sweetened beverage provision, the Supervisors voted 3-to-2 on an amended motion expressing concern that the County would "overstep its bounds" by denying constituents soft drinks. Supervisors asked County staff to research the impact of the provision and report back within 90 days.

The County spends \$3.6 billion in healthcare expenses and loses \$2.6 billion in productivity annually due to obesity, according to the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. The failure to ban sugar-sweetened beverage sponsorship from county-operated facilities sends a mixed message on health.

## **City of Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force**

November 20, 2009 marked the first organizing meeting for the Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force. The group includes Community Health Councils and approximately 20 other individuals who represent the diverse interests of the food supply system including food security activists, landscape architects, city/county government representatives, public health advocates, academic, and planning professionals. CHC brings a health equity perspective to the Task Force, and the group's efforts are consistent with CHC's work to increase access to wholesome foods as a means of addressing health disparities in South Los Angeles.

The meeting initiated a 6-month process to create and document a food-system vision for the City that incorporates existing food security activities and considers the viability of a future Los Angeles Food Policy Council. In this first meeting, the Task Force structure, operation, and communication process were discussed. Watch for updates on Task Force activities in futures issues of *Health Matters* or for more information, contact Gwen Flynn, CHC Policy Director, [gwen@chc-inc.org](mailto:gwen@chc-inc.org).

## **Upcoming Events**

**Building Healthy Communities Planning Workgroups.** *Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 9am-Noon.* Join South Los Angeles residents and advocates in The California Endowment's partnership with local communities to create a healthy environment. Help identify state and local changes to make our community healthier. Free childcare, simultaneous translation, and continental breakfast. Weingart YMCA, 9900 S. Vermont, Los Angeles 90044. Registration and more information are available on our website at [www.chc-inc.org](http://www.chc-inc.org).

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS  
323.295.9372 • [INFO@CHC-INC.ORG](mailto:INFO@CHC-INC.ORG)**