

Universal Health Care – The Health Care System We Don't Want

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It is clear that the U.S health care system has its share of problems. Costs are rising rapidly, some forty million Americans are without health insurance, and both doctors and patients decry their loss of options and control. However, as the cost of health insurance continues to rise, women in particular face difficult challenges because they are less likely to have employer- based coverage and are more likely to be the health decision maker in their families.

But would a government-run health care system be any better? Single-payer health care systems have been proposed in a handful of states as the solution to the problem of health care access for the uninsured. While single-payer plans can offer all citizens some type of health insurance policy, they cannot guarantee access to medical care – much less prompt delivery of quality care. The problem in the United States is that many Americans do not have access to affordable health care. However, in a single-payer system the issue is not having access to medical care at all.

We only have to look to Canada to see that government-run health care doesn't work. Single-payer plans inevitably control costs by rationing health care. Canadians often wait months to see a doctor or specialist or to receive much-needed medical treatment. Ninety percent of Canadians live within 100 miles of the United States, and many people are crossing the border to receive private medical care because private practice in Canada is limited to dentists and veterinarians.

Another way single-payer plans hold down costs is by having one centralized government bureaucracy make all decisions with regard to health care services and prices. Imagine being allowed to buy a car from only one manufacturer or allowed to purchase your groceries from only one supermarket? Single-payer means limited choices for consumers, and that discourages creativity, efficiency, quality and innovation among providers.

In government-run health care systems there is never enough money to provide timely care and the latest technology. That's because health care funds have to compete with other claims on government funds, such as education, welfare and defense.

While there is no question that our health care system is in trouble, a better solution would be to implement market-driven initiatives to restore competition to the state's health care market, such as refundable health insurance tax credits. Health tax credits represent a simple and realistic way to extend private health insurance coverage to those uninsured individuals and families who are most in need of assistance. It is an important component of an overall program to increase health care access and will provide a real solution to the problem of the uninsured by addressing affordability -- the most basic component of access to health care.