



Women's Working Group on Universal Health Care Health Care Reform Principles, October 2007

The Women's Working Group on Universal Health Care, representing women and girls across California, has come together to help shape health care policy and services to ensure access to the essential health care we need. There are a number of different aspects to the health care challenges we face. The number of women and girls who are uninsured is increasing and cost pressures have become insurmountable barriers to accessing health care for both insured and uninsured women. At the same time, we live longer, are more likely to have chronic health problems, and use more health care services over the course of our lives than men. We are also less likely to be insured through our employers and more likely to be covered as dependents. This puts us at an increased risk of losing our coverage if we divorce, are widowed or our spouses become unemployed. All of this translates to poorer health outcomes for women and girls and illustrates the need for health care reform policy to include women's and girls' perspectives.

As women and girls, we claim our universal human right to affordable, accessible, high quality health care that is fairly financed, efficiently administered, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and responsive to our expressed needs for comprehensive medical, social, and mental health services. Universal health coverage is a critical building block of a socially and economically just society. It will help to create a level playing field for California and the U.S. in the global economy, benefiting women across borders. We therefore advance the following Women's Health Platform for Universal Health Care to help women and girls achieve healthier lives.

To meet the needs of women and girls, health care reform must ensure:

1. **Access to affordable, accessible, high quality, comprehensive health care for all residents, independent of income, employment, gender, sexuality, ability, immigration, incarceration or health status.** Universal access to health care is essential to self-determination and the realization of one's full potential in society.
2. **Comprehensive benefits.** All services which are necessary or appropriate for the maintenance and promotion of women's and girls' optimal health across the life span should be included in a benefits package. This includes basic health care services, preventive care, preservation of function, comprehensive reproductive health care, health education, prescription drugs, and mental health and social services. Services and screenings should be gender and age appropriate.
3. **Access to care that is equitable and culturally and linguistically appropriate, with particular attention to vulnerable and underserved communities.** Health care policy needs to address the unique health needs and barriers experienced by women, especially women of color, low-income and poor women, young women and girls, immigrant women, incarcerated women, women with disabilities, and members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Questioning (LGBTIQ) communities. Barriers that undermine the provision of health care to individuals in underserved communities, and to women and girls generally include lack of trust in the health care system, lack of health insurance, environments that are not conducive to health maintenance as well as language, cultural, and physical barriers.
4. **Health care coverage that is affordable for individuals and families in relation to income.** Individuals and families should have continual and timely access to health care. The affordability of health care is a major issue for women and girls who are more likely to report cost-related access problems. These problems can be attributed directly to women's lower incomes compared with men and to their greater need for, and use of, health care services.
5. **A health care system that is fairly financed and establish mechanisms for controlling costs without impeding access.** Fair financing requires the participation of government, employers, providers, health plans, and individuals based upon their capacity. Costs must be controlled without creating financial barriers to access, in order to ensure the sustainability of the system.
6. **Community as well as individual health.** Universal coverage in itself removes an important source of social and economic inequality for women and girls. But eliminating health disparities and improving health for women and girls also requires comprehensive strategies that affect the social, cultural, environmental, and economic determinants of health. Related policies include, but are not limited to living wage, equal rights, employment opportunities, workplace representation, safe and healthy natural and built environments, absence of domestic and civic violence, affordable housing, access to safe and nutritious food, adequate public health infrastructure, and civic participation in democratic decision-making.