

University of Virginia Center for Politics



Talking Turkey: Health Care

General Facts

- The United States government currently pays nearly half (46%) of all citizen health care costs. The major public health care programs are:
 - **Medicaid:** Medicaid is health care program that both the state and federal governments fund. While each state sets its own eligibility requirements for Medicaid, the requirements are often largely income based.
 - **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):** Created in 1997, SCHIP provides health care coverage to children in low-income families whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid. In September 2007, President Bush vetoed the bill to renew SCHIP because of funding and eligibility issues. President Obama signed SCHIP in February 2009, which now provides quality health care to 11 million kids – 4 million who were previously uninsured.
 - **Medicare:** Medicare provides insurance for the elderly and many disabled citizens. The program offers several different types of coverage, including the 2006 addition of a prescription drug plan. The major issues with Medicare include confusing policies, especially the prescription drug plan, and the increasing number of citizens who qualify for Medicare as the Baby Boomer generation continues to age and life expectancy increases.
 - **Veterans Administration (VA):** The VA offers health care and access to medical facilities to veterans and their families. While many consider the VA to be one of the more successful health care programs, recent facility and care shortfalls, most notably Walter Reed Army Medical Center, have shed light on some of the problems with current veteran care.
- While the U.S. spends more money per person on health care than any other country, it receives relatively low rankings in health outcomes when compared to other industrialized nations.

- President Obama’s administration has taken some big steps toward reforming our health care system. Along with the passage of SCHIP, the **American Reinvestment and Recovery Act** helped to invest:
 - \$19 billion in computerized medical records that will help to reduce costs and improve quality while ensuring patients’ privacy.
 - \$1 billion for prevention and wellness
 - \$1.1 billion for research to give doctors tools to make the best treatment decisions for their patients by providing objective information on the relative benefits of treatments
 - \$500 million for health workforce to help train the next generation of doctors and nurses
- In September of 2009, President Obama put forth a proposal to drastically change our current health care system. This proposal called for a bipartisan effort to create the following:
 - **Affordability:** Helping 31 million families who cannot afford health care today be covered. This can happen by providing large middle class tax cuts and reducing premium costs for millions of families and small business owners who are priced out of coverage today.
 - **Creating a Competitive Market:** Give Americans the exact same health insurance choices that members of Congress have.
 - **Accountability:** Laying out common sense rules of the road to keep premiums down and prevent insurance industry abuses and denial of care.
 - **End Discrimination:** against Americans with pre-existing conditions.
 - **Stabilize our Budget and Economy:** Reducing the deficit by \$100 billion over the next ten years – and about \$1 trillion over the second decade – by cutting government overspending and reining in waste, fraud and abuse.

(Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/health-care>)
- The House and Senate have both passed their respective health care bills. However, extensive reconciliation must occur until the chambers end up with a bill on which they can both agree. Once this happens, President Obama can sign the health care bill into law.

Overview of Party Positions on Health Care

- The Democratic Party and its candidates tend to support universal health care through reorganizing and expanding current government programs to ensure every citizen access to affordable health care.

- The Republican Party and its candidates want to improve and expand health care coverage by reducing government programs and restrictions to allow for a more market-based, privatized health care system that focuses on personal choice and investment.

Links for Additional Info

- In Depth
 - Annals of Internal Medicine (source of most of the above information) <http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/0000605-200801010-00196v1>
- Candidate Positions
 - Barack Obama: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/healthcare/>
 - Hillary Clinton: <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/feature/healthcareplan/summary.aspx>
 - John McCain: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/19ba2f1c-c03f-4ac2-8cd5-5cf2edb527cf.htm>

Talking Points with Your Child

- What is health care? Why is having health insurance important?
- Who should pay for health care: Families? Mom or Dad's boss? The Government?
- Universal health care sounds expensive. Would you pay more taxes so that everyone could have some kind of health care? How would you make health care less expensive?
- If the U.S. spends more money per person on health care than any other country, why do you think it receives relatively low rankings?
- Do you think that privatized Health care would be beneficial to the public? Should health care be privatized or should it be the government's responsibility?
- (For Older Kids) Privatization vs. Universal Health Care → Choice and Free Markets vs. Regulation and the Common Good