



2008 National Issue Briefing and Advocacy Day

Creating Equity in Health Care for Latinos: Reforming the System Now

Background

Latinos are overwhelmingly disconnected from the health care system. As the ethnic group with the highest uninsurance rates in the country, Latinos are often deterred from accessing essential health care services. There is also evidence that many Latinos receive care that is substandard. In fact, in 2006 when compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Latinos fared worse – 77% in 22 core measurements of health care access and quality. From this vantage point, it is no surprise that Latinos are at a higher risk of developing health complications later in life, and suffer from higher rates of chronic health conditions, such as obesity and diabetes. As a debate on health care reform emerges, members of Congress have a clear opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to equity in health care in 2008. Members of the Congressional Tri-Caucus, who represent nearly seventy Representatives of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have united around comprehensive legislation to help reduce core barriers to quality health care services.

NCLR Position

Pass the “Health Equity and Accountability Act (H.R. 3014)” which offers key opportunities to improve the availability of critical health services in the Latino community. H.R. 3014, the “Health Equity and Accountability Act,” addresses broad concerns that create inequities in health care for minority individuals. This bill creates several points of entrance to the health care system for Latinos and immigrants, encourages the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate health care, including promotion of a diverse workforce and access to language services, and calls for comprehensive data collection and research to assess the effectiveness of health care in the U.S. for Latinos and other minorities. H.R. 3014 also provides financial resources to community-based programs to conduct health promotion activities, particularly in communities with low health literacy, and expand and enhance outreach and enrollment activities that open health insurance channels for Latinos and other Americans. This inclusive legislation begins to tackle the flaws of a system that leave many racial and ethnic minorities without good health care.

Why “H.R. 3014” Is Important

- **Coverage of health services helps people afford and gain access to essential care.**

Without access to health coverage many families are reluctant to seek health care when they need it. In fact, from 2000-03, when 30% of Hispanic were uninsured on average, they were significantly less likely to have a physician’s visit, access routine health services, or even go to the emergency room. In 2006, 15.3 million Latinos were uninsured, leaving more than one-third of Hispanics without the coverage needed to access essential resources. This legislation restores access to critical health care programs, such as Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for legally residing immigrants. In addition, the legislation incorporates grant programs for community-based organizations to enhance their health care referral services and create new outreach programs that connect more Latinos with health coverage services.

For more information, visit NCLR’s website at www.nclr.org. Contact NCLR Senior Health Policy Analyst **Jennifer Ng’andu** at (202) 776-1762 or jngandu@nclr.org.



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- **Effective communication in health settings is essential to ensure that patients can connect to services and experience good health outcomes.** Language barriers and low health literacy can shut patients out of the health system or, at minimum, contribute to higher rates of medical error. In fact, one study notes that approximately 25% of limited English proficient (LEP) patients had trouble understanding their medical instructions as compared to 2% of LEP patients who had access to interpreters. By increasing funding for the provision of language services and enhancing civil rights enforcement, this legislation improves opportunities for better communication and positive health outcomes. Furthermore, H.R. 3014 invests in community-based health promotion activities that ensure families have access to the medical information they need in a format that is easy to understand.
- **Diversification of the workforce is essential to strengthening the health care system.** Currently, only 3.1% of physicians in the U.S. are Latino, meaning that approximately for every thousand Hispanics in the U.S. there is only one Latino physician. Improving opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities to enter the workforce will broaden the opportunities of those communities to access quality health care. H.R. 3014 expands key educational opportunities and financial support for Latinos and other underrepresented communities to further their careers and enter advanced health professions, including physicians training.