

Next Step: Health Care

To Fix New Jersey's Economy,

We Need To Fix
Health Care Now



HEALTH CARE
FOR AMERICA **NOW**

“[T]here are some people who are making the argument that, well, you can’t do anything about health care because the economy comes first. They don’t understand that health care is the biggest component of our economy and, when it’s broken, that affects everything.”

President Barack Obama
February 10, 2009

Now that Congress has passed the economic recovery package, and President Obama has signed the legislation that will help get our nation moving in the right direction again, we must solve America's health care crisis. We cannot fix New Jersey's economy and fiscal crisis unless we fix our broken health care system now.

We need a national health care solution in 2009 that controls costs and guarantees quality, affordable health care to everyone in New Jersey and America. Skyrocketing health care costs are bankrupting our business, busting our state and local government budgets, and harming our families' financial security.

In order to build a healthy economy, we need to fix our health care system now.

We simply cannot afford the current system and its crushing impact on our economy. Comprehensive, national reform is the only way to get our state back on track.

In New Jersey, health insurance premiums have been increasing more than four times faster than wages. It is impossible for businesses, governments, and families to keep up. As a result, businesses are laying off workers or closing their doors. Governments are faced with unmanageable deficits. And every 30 seconds, someone in the United States declares bankruptcy due in part to medical costs.

The numbers are alarming. In 2008, the average premium for family coverage in New Jersey was \$14,001. By 2016, that number is expected to be almost \$25,000.¹ This is simply unsustainable. We must control health care costs, and the only way to do that is with comprehensive, national reform that controls spending and guarantees quality, affordable health care for everyone.

Health Care costs strangle state and local budgets.

Like in 46 other states, New Jersey has a staggering state budget deficit. This year, New Jersey faces a \$3.6 billion budget shortfall, more than 11% of the total state budget. Rising health care costs is one of the reasons.

- As of 2007, 3% of all New Jersey state spending went to Medicaid and SCHIP. \$838 million went to spending on Medicaid alone.¹
- New Jersey is taking steps to furlough state employees in the current fiscal year, has implemented a hiring freeze, and is threatening layoffs for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2009. Drastic cuts are projected in funding for local governments.

States like New Jersey are struggling to keep up with health care costs both in funding programs like Medicaid and CHIP and in providing their own employees health care coverage. And while states are trying to do the right thing and extend health coverage to children, families, and others who need it – which reduces overall costs by reducing hospital visits and increasing preventive care – these piecemeal solutions will not solve the health care crisis or help jump start the economy. We need a national solution to the health care crisis that controls spending and offers a guarantee of quality, affordable health care to everyone in America.

The situation in New Jersey, as in most states, is getting worse, not better, during the current economic recession. As the number of jobs goes down, the demand for public health care services goes up at the very time when New Jersey is already struggling to meet its current responsibilities and obligations. This is why Congress must act now.

Health Care costs drain family budgets.

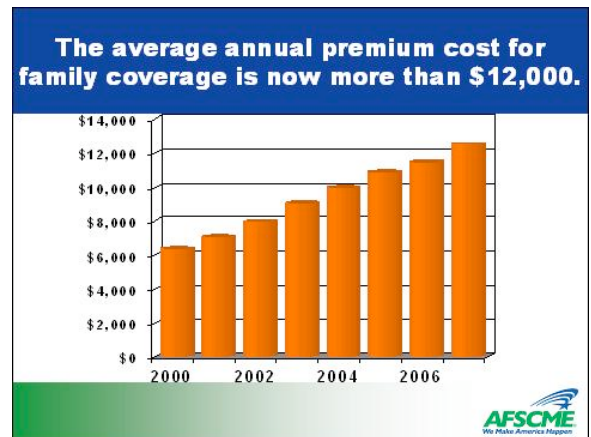
“[E]ven if they’ve got health insurance, the average family has seen their premiums double over the last eight years. Folks are paying twice as much. Co-payments have gotten higher; deductibles have gotten higher. And now, with people losing their jobs, they’re also losing their health care.”

President Barack Obama, February 10th

Nationally, premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance rose to \$12,680 annually for family coverage in 2008. On average, employees pay \$3,354 out of their paychecks to cover their share of the cost.²

Health care is increasingly unaffordable to New Jersey’s families – even those who have “good” coverage – thanks to rising co-pays, deductibles, and premiums. Every day, New Jersey residents are going without the care they need. And every day, families – and businesses – are dropping coverage altogether.

- From 2000 to 2007, premiums in New Jersey increased by more than 71% while median yearly wages increased only 15%.
- New Jersey’s median yearly wage in 2007 was only \$36,700, but the average health care premium for a family was \$12,979.³



Health Care costs force businesses to lay off workers or close shop.

“Businesses are also less competitive because of the fact that, here in the United States, we spend more than anybody else does. Any other nation on Earth per capita we spend more on health care, but we don’t get better results, and companies are paying for that.”

President Barack Obama, February 10th

For the 64% of employers in New Jersey who offer health coverage to employees, the skyrocketing cost of health premiums increasingly endangers the business’ ability to provide coverage to employees. Employers are forced to cut benefits or raise employee contributions in order to keep up with soaring premiums.⁴

- According to a recent survey by the Main Street Alliance – a network of state-based small business health care coalitions – 73% of small employers say they are willing to contribute financially to achieve quality, affordable health coverage for their employees. 63% say they are willing to contribute four to seven percent or more of total payroll costs, and 61% said they would have interest in buying into a statewide or national health care pool.⁵
- New Jersey companies spend an average of \$9,297 per employee per year for family coverage.⁶ Employers pay approximately 76% of the total cost of premiums for family coverage. Employees contribute the remaining 24%.
- The cost of employer-paid health coverage premiums in New Jersey increased by more than 71% from 2000 to 2007.⁷

The problem is getting worse, not better. More lost jobs means more lost health care coverage.

“COBRA is the law that says that, if you lose your job, you can keep your health care and you go through COBRA. Here’s the only problem: If you’ve lost your job, who can afford \$1,000 a month or \$1,200 a month for health care? You can’t afford it.”

President Barack Obama, February 10th

- As of December 2008, 324,906 New Jersey residents were unemployed. That reflects a loss of more than 130,000 jobs statewide last year alone, increasing the New Jersey unemployment rate by almost 3 percent.
- More than 5 million New Jersey residents (more than 59%) depend on their employers for health care coverage.⁸
- While 47,333 people will likely enroll in COBRA, which lets workers who lose their jobs continue their health benefits for a short time, the high cost of COBRA will force an estimated 93,759 people to enroll in Medicaid instead or fend for themselves on the private market.⁹
- The average New Jersey family unemployment insurance benefit is \$1,672 per month.

- The average cost of COBRA for a family in New Jersey is \$1,149, which eats up 68.7% of the average family unemployment benefit.¹⁰

Conclusion:

The urgency to fix America's broken health care system cannot be understated. In New Jersey and across the nation, families, businesses, and state and local governments are struggling with health care costs that are spiraling out of control. There is no end in sight without a national solution. We need quality, affordable health care we all can count on in 2009.

In the words of President Barack Obama: "My hope is, over the course of the year, I'm going to be able to work with Congress to move forward a bill that gets us on track to every single person in America being able to get affordable, decent health care coverage."

We are a wealthy enough country to do it, and that's going to be one of my top priorities as president of the United States."

Endnotes

1 "The Cost of Doing Nothing: Why the Cost of Failing to Fix Our Health System is Greater than the Cost of Reform," by Sarah Axeen and Elizabeth Carpenter, New America Foundation, p.38, November, 2008.

2 "Employer Health Benefits Survey," Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2008.

3 Premiums vs. Paychecks: A Growing Burden for New Jersey's Workers

4 State Health Facts: New Jersey, Kaiser Family Foundation, Accessed 2/12/09.

5 The Main Street Alliance, "Taking the Pulse of Main Street. Small Businesses, Health Insurance, and Priorities for Reform." January 2009.

6 Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts, Accessed 2/12/09.

7 Premiums vs. Paychecks: A Growing Burden for New Jersey's Workers

8 "Civilian labor force and unemployment by New Jersey and selected area, seasonally adjusted," Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1/27/09.

9 Calculations based on: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1/27/09; "Employee Coverage, Eligibility, and Participation," Kaiser Family Foundation, 9/24/08; State Health Facts: Individual State Profile for New Jersey, Published by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Full Methodology Available Upon Request.

10 Families USA, "Squeezed! Caught Between Unemployment Benefits and Health Care Costs," January 2009.