



SEIU: Building a New American Health Care System

Over the past several years, SEIU and its members have become the strongest force for quality affordable health care anywhere in America.

Through every means at our disposal – organizing workers, negotiating contracts, political leadership, grassroots action, legislative victories, and building alliances—SEIU has elevated the importance of health care and established itself as the force to be reckoned with, from the market place to the ballot box.

And we've just begun. The critical 2008 elections give us an unprecedented opportunity to raise the bar even higher. We are seizing that opportunity and will not stop until every man, woman and child has quality, affordable care they can count on.



This booklet tells our story.

As the largest union of health care workers, the fastest growing union in North America, and an organization dedicated to improving the lives of all working people and their families, the Service Employees International Union is uniquely positioned to take a leadership role on health care.

We know health care as providers, consumers, negotiators, and family members. And we know we need a new system, because what America has now is a disaster:

- 47 million Americans have no health coverage.
- 8 out of 10 of those without insurance are from working families.
- Health care premiums have increased four times faster than workers' wages.

What's more, even those with insurance are in trouble. Now, even insured Americans often can't pay their growing share of hospital bills, their co-pays and deductibles, or afford to fill their prescriptions.

- Fewer than 1 in 4 middle class families can cope financially with a typical medical emergency.
- In the past twenty years, the number of families declaring bankruptcy because of a health emergency has gone up by 2,000 percent.
- A recent study reported that half of bankruptcy cases were connected to medical bills.

And it's not just families who are suffering – American businesses feeling the pain of rising health care costs.

- Businesses spent half a trillion dollars on health care in 2005.
- In 2006, fewer than half of all small businesses offered health care coverage to their employees.
- As soon as 2008, the average Fortune 500 company will spend as much for health care as it makes in profits.

One million health care workers delivering quality care

No one knows the state of our health care system better than SEIU members. Every day, over one million nurses, home health care providers, nursing home aides, medical technicians, doctors, and other health care workers deliver the highest quality care possible to millions of Americans.

SEIU health care providers are on the front lines of the health care crisis. They know the importance of prevention. They see patients who can't afford to fill their prescriptions, and who wind up even sicker than they were before. They struggle to care for seniors in facilities that are poorly equipped and understaffed due to health care funding cutbacks.

Frustrated by a system that makes patient care difficult, and armed with a unique understanding of mounting challenges, SEIU health care workers have united to work for change:

- **Helping pass state legislation to make health care more affordable.**
Many states have decided they can't wait for Washington. SEIU health care workers have helped pass sweeping state-based health care reform measures in a half dozen states as we continue to work for a national solution.
- **Creating safe staffing policies that ensure quality patient care.**
Countless studies show that higher patient-to-nurse ratios are simply bad medicine. SEIU nurses have lobbied successfully for hospital and state policies that limit the number of patients under a nurse's care, ensuring that each patient receives the best treatment possible.
- **Joining with hospitals, nursing homes, and other providers to push for public health care funding.**
When politicians cut Medicare and Medicaid funding, patients suffer, particularly senior citizens, the working poor, children, and people with disabilities. SEIU health care workers have united with their employers – hospitals, nursing homes, and home care agencies – to prevent these cuts and lobby for better health care funding for patients who need it most.

The Largest and Fastest-Growing Union of Health Care Workers

We've been successful because SEIU is dedicated to giving hundreds of thousands of health care workers a voice at work. In 1998, the ranks of SEIU's health care workers grew by 125,000 when SEIU merged with America's other major health care union – 1199 New York. In 1999, after 10 years of perseverance, 74,000 Los Angeles homecare workers joined SEIU in the largest organizing election in modern labor history. And in the years following, over 350,000 homecare workers in Oregon, Michigan, Illinois, Washington, New York and Maine have joined SEIU – creating the largest and fastest-growing health care union in North America.

In 2007, SEIU consolidated all of its health care locals into an unprecedented nationwide union. SEIU Healthcare was created to meet the needs of SEIU health care members and the patients they care for, and to guarantee a voice at work for all 10 million health care workers in America.

To achieve that last goal, we have created Healthcare United, a national grassroots effort to reach out to all healthcare workers. Healthcare United members will mobilize on the state and federal level to put our patients before the profits of insurance and drug companies and work to elect a new president and Congress who share our vision for to build a new health care system. These healthcare workers will then be on the front lines holding our newly elected leaders accountable, ensuring that new system becomes a reality.

SEIU Members On The Frontlines of The Fight For Health Care

In addition to nurses, doctors, nursing home aides, and other health care workers, SEIU also represents hundreds of thousands of public, property service, and other service employees who are deeply affected by the health care crisis. From janitors in Houston and Cincinnati to child care providers in Illinois and Washington, SEIU members are fighting for – and winning – affordable health care for themselves and their families.

Americans for Health Care

Since 2002, SEIU's Americans for Health Care (AHC) project has united health care workers, consumers, small business owners, and other citizens to make health care for every man, woman and child a reality. With state-based campaigns in 20 states and nearly half a million Health Care Voters signed up nationwide, AHC is the largest grassroots health care reform organization in the country. AHC has:

- Mobilized Health Care Voters in key congressional races across the country and helped elect more than 30 pro-health care candidates in New Hampshire elections.
- Held a Chalk It Up! Day of Action in 33 states with thousands of health care voters who called on Congress to come up with real solutions to the crisis.
- Crafted and helped pass the historic Fair Share Health Care bill in Maryland.
- Helped pass Maine's health plan, a landmark comprehensive reform package.
- Helped reduce health care costs for many small businesses in New Hampshire.
- Made health care a key issue in presidential primaries across the country.

“If every child is guaranteed a public education, ever American must be guaranteed access to affordable health care.”

Andy Stern

A Country that Works

Federal Action

The Bush Administration has been a disaster for health care in America, but SEIU has been able to stop some of their worst ideas and win a few victories to advance health care:

- We pushed Congress to give states that have had SCHIP funding shortfalls additional help to keep eligible kids from losing coverage.
- The Genetic Nondiscrimination Act, which protects workers from discrimination based on the results of genetic testing, was recently signed into law.
- The Ryan White Act, supporting many effective state programs to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, was reauthorized in 2007.
- After a rash of stories in recent years have shown that many new drugs can be dangerous, the Food and Drug Administration was given new authority to make sure drugs that are approved are actually safe.
- Hospitals and nursing homes are now required to publicly report additional quality measures, helping patients can compare facilities.

Defining the National Debate

As the crisis has become more dire, SEIU members have established health care as our number one national priority. And we are working to make sure that our nation's leaders do the same.

SEIU's Vision for Reform

In early 2007, SEIU released its “Vision for Reform” - ten fundamental principles that will guide SEIU's work to promote health care solutions for every American:

- It is time for our nation to guarantee affordable health care coverage for all Americans. Piecemeal reform is not a solution.
- The current employer-based health care system is not the foundation for 21st century health care reform, particularly given the competitive challenges of a global economy.
- A universal health care system must ensure a choice of doctors and health care plans without gaps in coverage or access, and the delivery system must meet the needs of at-risk populations.

- A universal health care system must include a core health care benefit similar to one that is available to federal employees.
- Preventive care must be a part of any basic benefit plan to promote health, control costs, and eliminate economic and racial disparities.
- Any plan for health care reform must control costs by providing care that is cost efficient and medically effective.
- Secure electronic medical records that consumers control are necessary to increase quality and reduce costs.
- Hospital and physician quality, outcome, and cost data must be available to consumers.
- A universal health care system must integrate long term care services, reduce out-of-pocket costs, and maximize opportunities for individuals to receive assistance in home- and community-based settings, rather than in hospitals and nursing homes.
- Employers, individuals, and government must share responsibility for financing the system.

Setting the Challenge for Our Next President

For too many years, presidential candidates addressed the growing health care crisis in one of two ways: they either ignored the issue outright, or provided rhetoric without concrete solutions.

Early in the presidential race, SEIU made clear that all the candidates must make health care their top priority. Along with the Center for American Progress Action Fund, we held the first national health care forum in the campaign.

Way back in March of 2007, seven of the Democratic candidates came to Nevada to outline their views. Hundreds of SEIU workers were there, asking the tough questions. We got the ball rolling.

Then we threw down the gauntlet: any presidential candidate seeking the support of SEIU's 2 million members must provide a detailed, comprehensive plan to provide health care to every man, woman and child in America. The candidates responded. Every major Democratic candidate produced a health care plan.

"SEIU...has successfully pushed every Democrat in the race into supporting universal health care."
New Yorker Magazine
September 17, 2007

New Yorker Magazine
September 17, 2007

“For those
who say
let’s wait,
procrastinate
or engage in
more debate,
I say, the
one single-
repeatedly
proven lesson
Americans
have learned
in the
decades of
failed efforts
of reform
is this: the
longer we
wait, the
worse it gets.”

Andy Stern

Building a National Movement

The health care crisis affects everyone. We will only solve it if all of us – workers, businesses large and small, health care providers, and elected leaders – are part of the solution.

To that end, SEIU has been a catalyst for cooperation, urging leaders from labor, business, health care, and both political parties to set aside their differences and work together for change.

In July of 2006, SEIU President Andy Stern wrote a letter to every Fortune 500 CEO, asking them to make health care their national priority. Many responded and are becoming part of the solution. And, starting in 2007, SEIU has been at the center of a number of unique partnerships forged to help move towards real answers.

- **Divided We Fail**, a coalition with AARP, the Business Roundtable and the National Federation of Independent Business, was launched to press elected leaders to set aside partisan gridlock and work for real solutions to the high cost of health care and long-term financial security.
- **Better Health Care Together**, including founding members SEIU, AT&T, the Howard H. Baker, Jr. Center for Public Policy, the Center for American Progress, the Committee for Economic Development, the Communications Workers of America, Intel, Kelly Services, and Wal-Mart, was established around four common sense principles for achieving a new American health care system by 2012.
- **The Partnership for Quality Care** brings together some of the nation’s largest health care providers and labor unions to press for the reform and improvement of our health care system. Members include public, private, religious, teaching and nonprofit hospitals and integrated health systems as well as more than a million SEIU health care workers across the country; together, they care for more than 45 million patients a year.
- **Health Care For America Now (HCAHN)** is a coalition of the nation’s leading grassroots organizations, including ACORN, AFSCME, AFL-CIO, the Center For Community Change, Planned Parenthood, SEIU, and US Action, all of whom are uniting their forces to make sure that fixing health care is the nation’s number one priority in 2009.

The Time Is Now

Every year, the problems facing our health care system continue to mount. Costs continue to rise, quality continues to decline, and more and more lose insurance or can’t afford it. The bottom line is this: the longer we wait, the worse it gets. The time to fix health care is now.

That's why, in early 2008, SEIU launched a sweeping new campaign to win quality, affordable health care for every man, woman and child in America.

The campaign is combining an aggressive paid and earned media strategy with an unprecedented grassroots effort to elect a new President and Congress committed to fixing health care – and then tap into that same energy to ensure those newly elected leaders pass comprehensive legislation early in 2009.

SEIU will deploy the following tools to make health care the central issue in this election and to help elect a president committed to real solutions:

- Deploying thousands of SEIU staff around the country to be grassroots activists for health care change.
- Paid Advertising in targeted markets will draw sharp distinctions between the Republican and Democratic presidential nominees' approach to health care, and what those differences will mean to working families.
- "The Road to Health Care," a nationwide tour, will travel through battleground states on its way to the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, stopping in communities small and large to highlight real people who are struggling to afford health care.
- Organizers will collect thousands of health care stories, giving voice to the millions of people with and without coverage who are finding it impossible to keep up with rising health care costs.
- Through national days of action, SEIU will take on the enemies of healthcare reform, the people and organizations trying to prevent positive change from happening - whether they be insurance companies or John McCain.

Holding John McCain Accountable

Early in 2007, we asked John McCain to produce a comprehensive health care plan. He hasn't. And we're letting American know about this failure. Using every weapon at our disposal – research, paid advertising, Americans for Health Care, and more – SEIU is giving voters "straight talk" about the holes in John McCain's health care proposal. We have:

- Produced a sweeping research-based evaluation of McCain's plan, revealing its flaws on different pieces of the health care puzzle, especially on cost and coverage.
- Aired a major TV ad in the critical state of Ohio just as McCain was trying to defend his health care ideas.
- Held protests around the country at McCain events to dramatize his mistreatment of health care, indifference to Americans' suffering, and close financial ties to the insurance industry.

The Future

SEIU's health care profile – and power – will only continue to grow. And after we elect a pro-worker president and stronger pro-worker majorities in Congress, we will take all our energy, ideas, organizing strength, grassroots lobbying and political muscle, and make it happen.

Next year, 2009, we – all of us – will make history. We will achieve quality, affordable health care for every man, woman, and child in America.



Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

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