

SENATOR JOE BIDEN ON HEALTH ISSUES

"The 21st century starts with the promise of even greater advances in health care and the treatment of diseases. If we take the right steps now, we will be able to live fuller and longer lives."

– Senator Joe Biden

THE BIDEN PLAN: A PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHIER AMERICA

Getting More Americans Health Insurance: Senator Biden is committed to reducing the ranks of the uninsured—especially the 9 million children without health insurance—and improving American’s access to essential health care services. He is working to provide health insurance to more Americans by:

- Expanding the SCHIP program to allow more children to participate, and increasing outreach efforts to enroll every child eligible for SCHIP and Medicaid—so that families won’t have to rely on emergency rooms to get needed health care for their children.
- Allowing uninsured Americans the opportunity to purchase an insurance plan that mirrors the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) and by giving people 55 and older the chance to buy in to early coverage under Medicare.
- Providing federal coverage for catastrophic cases so that patients have a limit to the burden of astronomical health care costs and to help lower premiums to make insurance more affordable for businesses and individuals.

Encouraging Prevention and Modernization: The United States spends more money than any other nation on health care—currently around \$2.2 trillion—but does not have the expected health outcomes to show for it. Obesity rates have doubled over the last two decades and we currently spend 75 cents of every health care dollar on patients with chronic diseases. Senator Biden wants to bring health care costs under control and increase the quality of care by:

- Placing a greater emphasis on prevention and wellness to contain health care costs associated with chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, asthma, osteoarthritis and heart disease.
- Establishing a Comparative Effectiveness Panel to evaluate treatment protocols, medical devices and new technology, and establish best practices for management of chronic diseases.
- Continuing support for and increasing investment in health information technology like electronic medical records.
- Urging the adoption of uniform billing and claims processes to reduce administrative costs.

Strengthening the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program: Senator Biden fought for years to expand the Medicare program to cover prescription drugs with a plan that would provide valuable coverage, be easy to use, and affordable to most seniors. Senator Biden supports improving Medicare’s prescription drug program by:

- Allowing the federal government to directly negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, which could help lower drug prices for consumers.
- Eliminating the benefit gap in coverage, otherwise known as the “donut hole.”
- Speeding up availability of generic drugs.

Increasing Funding for Biomedical Research: Senator Biden understands the important role the federal government plays in finding cures for cancer and other diseases by supporting important biomedical research. He is working to strengthen these efforts by:

- Continuing robust funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), building on the successful effort that doubled NIH funding over five years.
- Adopting the NIH guidelines on federal funding for stem cell research.
- Establishing a biotechnology coordinator in the Executive Branch.
- Developing vaccines and other effective responses to potential biological weapons.

Protecting the Privacy of Medical Records: Senator Biden knows how important it is to patients that their personal medical information be kept private. He supports:

- Making sure individuals' medical information is not used against them or unknowingly sold for commercial profit.
- Ensuring that as we move toward more efficient, cost-saving electronic medical records, privacy interests remain a priority.
- Preventing the use of predictive genetic information, such as whether someone carries the gene for breast cancer, from being used to discriminate against persons in decision-making related to employment or health insurance.

THE BIDEN RECORD: PROTECTION AND PREVENTION

Safeguarding Medicare and Medicaid: Senator Biden has consistently fought efforts to undermine these important programs for our nation's seniors and low-income citizens, and has worked to enhance their effectiveness through:

- Ensuring an adequate supply of physicians by opposing arbitrary caps on reimbursements and reforming the provider payment system, including voting to override President Bush's veto of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008, which prevented a 10 percent cut in reimbursement from taking place.
- Providing greater access to preventive services to help reduce the number of Medicare enrollees burdened with chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, asthma, hypertension, osteoarthritis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- Strengthening Medicare anti-fraud efforts.
- Allowing disabled patients in Medicaid to receive care in the least restrictive setting possible and to direct their own treatment plan.
- Opposing proposed regulations by the Bush Administration that would have jeopardized services for the neediest Medicaid recipients and imposed a greater financial burden on state governments.
- Supporting increased federal Medicaid funding when states are faced with a fiscal crisis.

Preventing Breast Cancer: Senator Biden has led efforts to detect, treat and prevent breast cancer. by:

- Helping to enact the breast and cervical cancer prevention program to ensure mammograms are available to low-income women and women without health insurance, and then expanding the program to offer treatment.
- Urging increased funding for the Department of Defense's Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program.
- Encouraging research to look for environmental causes of breast cancer.

- Originating legislation passed in the Senate each year since 1993 recognizing National Mammography Day every October to encourage women to have mammograms.
- Sponsoring legislation to expand Medicare to include coverage of mammograms.
- Fighting to guarantee insurance companies do not deprive breast cancer survivors of reconstructive surgery.

Supporting Cancer Research and Treatment: While Senator Biden has long been an advocate for breast cancer research, he has also supported many initiatives in Congress to promote research and treatment for other cancers. For example, Senator Biden has tried to combat cancer and its devastating effects on patients and family members by:

- Supporting increased funding for cancer research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI).
- Promoting Ovarian and Prostate cancer research through the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program.
- Sponsoring legislation designed to reduce childhood cancer by establishing programs of research excellence in the area of pediatric cancers at NIH and NCI.

Supporting Mental Health Parity: Senator Biden has long cosponsored legislation to ensure that the limitations on health insurance coverage of mental illness are no more restrictive than the limitations on coverage for other medical and surgical disorders. He also helped efforts to ensure that cost sharing under Medicare is the same for mental health services as it is for other medical services.

Preserving Genetic Non-Discrimination: Senator Biden was a long-time cosponsor of recently enacted legislation that prevents the use of predictive genetic information, such as whether someone carries the gene for breast cancer, from being used in decision-making related to employment or health insurance.

Ensuring Proper Health Care for America's Veterans: Believing our nation has the highest obligation to provide proper medical care for the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women who bear the physical and emotional scars of serving their country at war, Senator Biden has consistently fought for increased funding for VA health services for all veterans, opposed new fees and co-payments on veterans and has supported medical research of diseases and injuries that disproportionately affect veterans. He has worked tirelessly to ensure that the troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan receive the care they are entitled to, especially those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, the signature issue of these wars. Senator Biden was also instrumental in making sure the VA hospital in Elsmere stays open, as well as opening community-based outpatient clinics in Dover and Georgetown.

Providing Comprehensive Health Services for People with HIV/AIDS: A co-sponsor of the original Ryan White CARE Act, Senator Biden has maintained his commitment to funding research and treatment for people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., while also supporting international efforts to reduce the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Africa and developing countries around the world.

Improving Living Conditions for Disabled Citizens: Senator Biden has long championed efforts to allow Medicaid to provide the home- and community-based support services needed by disabled individuals to remain out of institutions. He also fought to allow low-income families with disabled children to buy in to the Medicaid program.

Supporting Graduate Medical Education: Throughout his career, Senator Biden has backed initiatives supporting graduate medical education to ensure that our nation's health professionals are properly trained. He has opposed cuts in Medicare payments to cover indirect medical education costs of teaching hospitals like Christiana Care and has cosponsored legislation to expand the number of resident physician training positions in states with a shortage of resident physicians. He has also fought for increased funding for the Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education program that provides payments to children's hospitals like A.I. DuPont to defray the costs of training residents.

Ensuring an Adequate Supply of Nurses: Recognizing the problems a nursing shortage presents to Delaware and the rest of the country, Senator Biden has long supported efforts to provide scholarship and loan repayment programs for nursing students, award grants to nursing schools and health organizations, increase the number of nurse faculty and promote public information programs to encourage people to enter the nursing profession. He also supports increased federal funding for nurse-managed health clinics, like the one housed at the University of Delaware, that provide training opportunities for students and primary care for underserved or vulnerable populations.

Reducing Disparities in Health Care: Eliminating the disparity in access to health care and health outcomes based on race and ethnicity is important to Senator Biden. He has championed increased funding for minority health programs within the federal Department of Health and Human Services, including funding for workforce diversity programs, the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative, the Office of Minority Health and the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities at NIH.

Promoting Community Health Centers: Community health centers are a vital component of the health care safety net and have been strongly supported by Senator Biden. Throughout his years in Congress, Senator Biden has supported efforts to improve funding levels for Delaware's federally qualified health centers: La Red Health Center, Delmarva Rural Ministries, Kent Community Health Center, Henrietta Johnson Medical Center and Westside Health.