

For Immediate Release
December 22, 2008

Contact: Dr. Jaime R. Torres
Phone: 917.304.6886
jtorres@LatinosNHI.org

NPRC HOSTS MEETING OF LATINO LEADERS TO OUTLINE LATINO HEALTHCARE INEQUITIES THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED IN 2009

Washington, DC - Latino leaders representing organizations across the country convened on December 12 in Washington, D.C. to launch the Latino Agenda for Healthcare Reform. The new coalition plans to ensure that healthcare equity for Latinos is addressed in any new reform measures proposed by the next President and Congress. Nationally, the U.S. Census reports that while Latinos are 14% of the nation they are 30%, or more than 15 million, of the uninsured.

"Hispanic/Latino leaders strongly urge the New Administration and Congress to develop a comprehensive healthcare reform plan that will eliminate health disparities, as well as the financial, institutional, cultural and linguistics barriers in accessing and using the healthcare system," said Aida L. Giachello, Associate Professor and Director of the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training and Policy Center at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

The Latino Agenda for Healthcare Reform outlines a set of principles aimed at ensuring that Latino voices are heard in the nation's Capitol as well as around the country in the reform debate. "We can't leave anything to chance. Latinos have to be at the table when measures are debated. Attention to disparities" in insurance coverage, in affordability and medical treatment "is long overdue. Our experiences must be represented," she added.

Studies, including The Institute of Medicine's landmark report "Unequal Treatment: What Health Care Providers Need to Know About Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care," find that even when all things are comparable -- including insurance status, income, age, and diagnosis among non-whites and minorities -- minorities receive lower-quality health care. Stereotyping, prejudice, and clinical uncertainty on the part of providers contribute to disparities, according to the study. Additionally, studies from Families USA, the Institute of Medicine and the Urban Institute have found that premature death is often linked to lack of insurance, since people without insurance often have to forgo tests and treatment.

"There is much at stake for Latinos and we must be part of those policy discussions," said Dr. Jaime Torres, President of Latinos for National Health Insurance. "We need reforms that remove rather than perpetuate these problems," he added, "a democratic healthcare system that treats all equally can save lives." Latinos for National Health Insurance convened the leaders in an effort to build a new movement of Latino involvement in healthcare reform discussions and policymaking.

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“Since our community is disproportionately affected by a number of diseases, it is imperative to have Hispanic influence and visibility at decision-making levels or the needs of our community will continue to go unmet and unrecognized. The National Puerto Rican Coalition wants this coalition to be a national voice and to develop initiatives for the improvement of quality and access for Puerto Ricans/Hispanics,” □ said Rafael Fantauzzi, President and CEO of the National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.

The meeting drew a wide range of Latino leaders from the academic, medical, labor, and advocacy communities. The coalition plans to work with elected officials and community members from across the country to ensure that the promise of reform delivers access to high quality, culturally and linguistically competent care to every man, woman and child who lives in the United States and its territories.

"New policies can lead to new changes and we believe that 2009 presents us with an opportunity to eliminate the health disparities that not only harm Latinos but harm all underserved communities," said Brent Wilkes National Executive Director of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

The Latino Agenda for Healthcare Reform coalition asks that Latino experts from around the country be part of these discussions. The coalition will make available names of many of these experts that can be consulted in the process.

Latino Agenda for Healthcare Reform

We applaud the recent renewed interest and debates by elected officials and policymakers to create legislation to ensure that persons living in the United States have adequate access to healthcare.

However, we are very concerned that just as all economic high tides don't raise all boats, all "healthcare reform" proposals might not adequately address the Latino communities' healthcare needs, especially when it comes to affordability, geographic diversity, citizenship status, language barriers, chronic diseases, and pervasive health disparities.

We, as organizations that represent diverse Latinos from across the nation, must ensure that any healthcare reform proposal seriously being considered must take into the account the hard realities that Latino families face every day and ensure that proposals guarantee access to an inclusive health care system that provides comprehensive quality care and address health disparities. To this end, we articulate a common set of principles that we believe are central to any health reform agenda. They are:

An Inclusive Health Care System

- Guarantees accessible healthcare for all people residing in the USA and territories.
- Ensures real world affordability that takes into account the economic realities of our community and that does not ration or segregate healthcare coverage or services based on income.

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Comprehensive Quality Care:

- Requires a package of comprehensive care available to everyone that is not dependent on health status, income, or ability to pay that includes preventive services, and treatment and long-term supportive services for serious and chronic conditions.
- Encompasses a clear strategy for developing the quality workforce required to provide high quality care and ensuring it's adequately distributed, especially in underserved communities.

Addressing Health Disparities:

- Demands a financial commitment to directly address pervasive health disparities with targeted prevention and treatment programs.
- Includes concrete plan for ensuring the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate care.

SIGNATORIES: (Partial List)

Latinos for National Health Insurance
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Council of La Raza
Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund
Service Employee International Union
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Puerto Rican Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Latina Health Network
District Council 37/ AFSCME, New York
Universal Health Care Foundation Connecticut
National Minority AIDS Council
Alianza Dominicana
Center for the Health of Urban Minorities, New York
Midwest Latino Health Research Center, Chicago
Raul Yzaguirre, Executive Director
Center for Community Development and Civil Rights, Phoenix

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