

# SOCIETY FOR SOCIAL WORK LEADERSHIP IN HEALTH CARE WASHINGTON STATE CHAPTER

## Position Paper for 2009 Legislative Session

### PRESERVE HEALTHCARE BENEFITS AND SERVICES FOR WASHINGTON RESIDENTS

#### Issue Statement

***We endorse the efforts of Washington State Hospital Association and Washington Community Action Network to insure healthcare coverage for our citizens.***

Although the state faces a projected \$5 billion deficit in the next biennium on a \$34 billion budget, our organization asks that legislators prioritize funding for health care coverage and services as a basic human need. Healthcare is not a commodity to be marketed or denied to citizens.

**Health care makes up more than 20 percent of the state budget and is at risk.** If reductions must occur, we urge that they be thoughtful and reasonable cuts that do not throw more people into the growing ranks of the uninsured. Washington already has over 590,000 residents without health coverage, including 73,000 children, and almost a million more receive coverage through at-risk state-funded assistance with Medicaid and Basic Health Plan.

**Many areas of health care services desperately need more state funding:** Coverage for children, trauma funding, the health partnership for small business insurance coverage, and mental health coverage are important examples of basic services that were scheduled for expansion. Existing levels of service must be maintained. The number one budget priority for health care advocates is to avoid or minimize cuts to existing health care programs.

**We urge legislators not to make cuts that will have serious and long-term effects on our residents.** When people cannot get access to primary and preventive care, their health deteriorates. Children have more difficulty in school, and adults have difficulty maintaining a job. Our hospitals are already providing care to state subsidized patients at rates well below the cost of their care. We cannot accept cuts in payment rates or cuts in eligibility that will result in more uninsured people in our emergency rooms. Cutting public health insurance programs increases costs for everyone.

#### ASK YOUR LEGISLATOR TO PRIORITIZE FUNDING FOR HEALTHCARE

**We understand Washington is facing a very difficult budget situation. We urge legislators to:**

- *Avoid cuts to health care coverage and services;*
- *Support full implementation of the next steps of Apple Health for Kids (Cover All Kids by 2010) and the Health Insurance Partnership for Small Business Health Coverage;*
- *Maintain safety net programs such as Medicaid and Basic Health;*
- *Support preventative care that help patients maintain health and reduce costly illness and hospitalizations;*
- *Insure that those without English skills receive coverage for language interpreters.*

**Action Needed: Urge lawmakers to be creative in closing the budget gap, and to look for new sources of revenue rather than simply cutting essential health services.**

SSWLHC /Washington State Chapter

The Society for Social Work Leadership and Health Care/WA Chapter is a professional organization representing over 120 medical social workers statewide, and providing members with specialized information, education, advocacy, and networking opportunities that improve our ability to support patients and families. For more information, see SSWLHC/WA website ([www.sswlhc-wa.org](http://www.sswlhc-wa.org)) or contact 2007-08 or Social Policy Chair Lynn Carrigan at [carrigan2006@yahoo.com](mailto:carrigan2006@yahoo.com).