



HEALTHWELL
FOUNDATION®

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Editor's note: For reporters covering the Health Care Reform Bill, HealthWell is an expert spokesperson on the Bill's impact on the underinsured.

**Protections for Underinsured Must Be Next Step
in Historic Health Care Reform**

***HealthWell Foundation Vows to Continue
Safety-Net Support for People in Need***

Gaithersburg, MD (March 25, 2010)—The HealthWell Foundation, a national nonprofit that helps underinsured Americans afford their medical treatments, applauds lawmakers for passing the historic health care reform bill this week. While the bill extends coverage to millions of uninsured people, it does not adequately address the problem of the underinsured—people who have health insurance but not enough coverage to afford the care they need. It may even increase the number of people in this underserved group.

It is estimated that anywhere from 25 million to over 40 million Americans are underinsured. Now, as newly covered individuals seek treatment, they may not have the financial resources to cover their medical expenses. This dilemma is particularly significant for those dealing with chronic and life-altering illnesses.

“While this bill is an important first step, we need to remain vigilant about the growing underinsured population in this country,” commented David Knowlton, President and CEO of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute and HealthWell Foundation Board Member. “Failure to do so could result in severe economic consequences and could contribute to a further increase in medical expense-related bankruptcies.”

The HealthWell Foundation vows to continue the prescription drug copayment and premium assistance support it has provided to Americans since 2003. Demand for HealthWell's services increased 40 percent in the past year as costs skyrocketed and the recession hit.

“The underinsured are a largely forgotten group in this health care debate,” stated Mary P. Sundeen, Executive Director of the HealthWell Foundation. “Over the next decade, we anticipate the demand for co-payment assistance will rise dramatically as the burden of medical expenses on Americans reaches the highest level in our nation's history. To stabilize the crisis of the underinsured, it is imperative that timely support be given to this rapidly growing and presently underserved population.”

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The current situation is stark:

- Co-payments, premiums and other out of pocket expenses have increased 40 percent over the past 10 years.ⁱ
- More than one in five patients have been forced to abandon treatment simply because they couldn't afford their medications and co-pays.ⁱⁱ
- Medical bills have contributed to more than 60 percent of personal bankruptcies in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The health care reform bill decreases payments to Medicare Advantage plans, which will likely result in increased premiums and co-payments, making required therapies and medications more expensive for seniors.
- While Medicare Part D coverage gap discounts are important, the bill's phased-in approach does not provide immediate relief, leaving many seniors unable to meet their cost-sharing obligations.

“It is regrettable that millions of people in this country have to choose between paying for lifesaving therapies or paying for a mortgage and other family expenses,” said Sundeen. “Getting required treatments, medications and care should not be a path to financial ruin for so many Americans.”

To learn more about how you can make a difference in the lives of America's underinsured, please visit the HealthWell Foundation website at www.healthwellfoundation.org.

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Since 2003, the HealthWell Foundation® has helped more than 100,000 patients with serious and chronic conditions meet their cost-sharing obligations for treatment. HealthWell is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit association that provides financial assistance to cover the cost of prescription drug coinsurance, co-payments and deductibles, and health insurance premiums. The Foundation considers individual financial, medical and insurance situations when determining assistance eligibility.

i. Kathryn Anne Paez, Lan Zhao and Wenke Hwang, “Rising Out-of-Pocket Spending for Chronic Conditions: A Ten-Year Trend,” *Health Affairs*, January 2009.

ii. Peter J. Cunningham, Laurie E. Felland, “Falling Behind: Americans' Access to Medical Care Deteriorates, 2003-2007,” *Center for Studying Health System Change*, June 2008.

iii . David U. Himmelstein, MD, Deborah Thorne, PhD, Elizabeth Warren, JD, Steffie Woolhandler, MD, MPH, “Medical Bankruptcy in the United States, 2007: Results of a National Study,” *The American Journal of Medicine*, August 2009.