



November 2008

**To: Our Colleagues in the Health Care Justice Movement
From: Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN)**

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*Re: America Votes for Obama and Health Care Reform –
What Happens Now?*

The big battle for major health care reform is about to begin anew. Sixteen years ago, a newly formed UHCAN jumped into the battle with a “**Care-A-Van**” to Little Rock. We are older, perhaps even wiser and at least as excited to get this chance again. UHCAN offers these thoughts as a modest contribution to the “**what do we do now?**” conversations taking place throughout our movement.

- **America needs health care justice**

The imperative for fundamental health care reform was clear in 1992. It is even clearer today. We said then that health care costs too much, covers too little, excludes too many and is getting worse. It is even more true today. Statistics are human beings with the tears wiped away. Behind every health care statistic are real people with real tears. Remembering this keeps us committed to the fight.

- **It will be a very big battle**

The health care reform fight will likely be even bigger than last time. Health care is a huge slice of the American economy, an economy in crisis. Health care impacts all of – every family, every business, every level of government. While this could bring us together as a people, health care today also has even more powerful entrenched interests who will not sit back and let health care be reformed around them. They will do all they can to influence the direction of health care reform in 2009 just like in 1993.

- **Will the people be heard?**

The voice of the powerful corporate interests will surely be heard. It always is. But what of the voice of the people? It is rarely heard in the legislative chambers where reform is debated and laws are made. That is our mission. Not UHCAN’s alone, but the collective mission of all advocates of health care justice in America. **Our collective challenge is to make sure the voice of the people is amplified and heard so real health care justice is the outcome of the reform battle.**

- **Yes, we can. (But it ain’t easy.)**

We have just come through a remarkable election season. We’ve seen the enormous effort required to get the voice of the people heard in a national election. The legislative battle over health care reform will in many respects be more difficult. There is no Election Day to help us keep our eyes on the prize. The American people won’t get a chance to vote for health care reform, then see the results flashed on screens all over the country that same night.



- **Organization wins campaigns**
 UHCAN's role since our founding has been to support the grassroots organizations that make sure the voice of the people is amplified and heard in health care reform. Movements that make major change happen need lots of effective organizations, coalitions, campaigns and activities that engage the public and push policymakers to act. If we don't have the strongest possible, best-connected, most effective organizations on the ground in states and cities across the country, the voice of the people will not be heard. And health care reform will once more be shaped by the powerful corporate interests that profit from the status quo.
- **Are we ready?**
 Are we strong enough to be heard in the halls of Congress? Do we effectively communicate with each other, with the public and with decision makers? The coming period will severely test organizational capacity across our broad health care justice movement. Each of our organizations needs to take a hard look at ourselves and figure out how we can do better. UHCAN strongly believes that increasing our organizational strength and improving our effectiveness to work together is a necessary component of a winning effort. This is where we will focus our work in this period.
- **We are many**
 The health care justice movement encompasses multiple approaches, histories and perspectives. That is the basis of the **UHCAN Unity Initiative**. No part of our country has one single organization that encompasses all the health care justice groups in their area. Every region, every state has more than one group - often many groups - at work on health care. Some are single issue, some are multi-issue, some are single-constituency, some are multi-constituency, some work on only one policy approach, some work on multiple policy approaches, some address the inadequacies of the current health care situation and some work mainly around their vision for the future. Adding it all up gives us our potential strength.
- **We have to work together to be heard**
 If we - the rich diversity of health care justice groups across our nation - are to succeed in making the voice of the people be heard on health care, then we work to not drown each other out, shout each other down, or create discord instead of harmony. We are like a big symphony with many different parts. We don't have to all sing the same part, but if we learn how to work together effectively, we can make beautiful music together. We need to find our common ground and make sure that all the voices add up to the unity required to make health care reform serve the people of this nation. We do not give up our individual views or reduce ourselves to a lowest common denominator, but rather create a whole that is greater – and stronger-- than any of our parts.
- **Unity leads to victory**
 We enter this round of health care reform with our eyes open. Building greater unity in the health care movement is no easy task. But we deeply believe it is necessary. Even with a united, effective movement that amplifies the voice of the American people to a mighty roar, victory is not guaranteed. Without it, defeat is certain. In the words of U.S. Congressman John Conyers, **“We have long been on the right side. If we are united, we will be on the winning side as well.”**