



Frequently Asked Questions: Southeast Asian Americans and Health Care Reform

Health care reform is an issue that is very complex. It will have significant impact on all Americans, including those who do not have health insurance, those who are on Medicare, Medicaid, or other health care insurance plans. Below are a few frequently asked questions and answers to help you to engage in shaping the future of health care to best meet the needs of our communities.

1. What is health care reform?

Health care reform is an effort to improve the health care system throughout the country. Earlier this year, President Obama announced his principles for health care reform. Currently, Congress is considering different health care reform policies to improve our current health care system. Health care reform proposals *currently* include the *America's Health Future Act of 2009* out of the Senate Finance Committee, the *Affordable Health Choices Act* out of the Senate HELP Committee, and *America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009* (H.R. 3200) proposed by the House Tri-Committee, which is the joint collaboration of the House Committees on Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce and Education and Labor.

2. Why should Southeast Asian Americans care about health care reform?

- **Expand Medicaid** – It is important to expand Medicaid eligibility in health care reform to include adults with no children, or those with no children under the age of 18. Approximately 20% of Southeast Asian Americans receive Medicaid. This percentage is the highest amongst all other Asian American groups.¹
- **Improve Mental Health Resources** – Provisions in health care reform bills that include mental health care as part of new health care plans are needed. Many Southeast Asian Americans who arrived as refugees experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of trauma endured in times of war and conflict. Nearly 70% of Southeast Asian Americans receiving mental health care are diagnosed with PTSD.²
- **Increase Elder Care Resources** – Provisions in health care reform reducing barriers to home and community based services and increased resources for such programs are needed. Among the many health needs of Southeast Asian American elders, in home supportive services and community based care remain priorities. Over 90% of Southeast Asian Americans living in the U.S. who are 65 and over live in family households rather than in institutions such as nursing homes.³

3. Where does SEARAC stand on health care reform?

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) recognizes the dire need for health care reform and supports the following general health care principles:

¹The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and The Asian & Pacific Islander Health Forum. *Race, Ethnicity and Health Care: Health Coverage and Access to Coverage Among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders* <http://www.kff.org/minorityhealth/upload/7745.pdf>, please note that this figure includes more than populations served by SEARAC. Southeast Asians, in this document includes individuals from Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, and Thailand

² Surgeon General's Report. Factsheet: Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders. <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cre/fact2.asp>

³ Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, *Southeast Asian American Elders in California*, <http://www.searac.org/sea-eldersrpt-fin.pdf>

- **Affordable Health Care** – Health disparities and coverage often correlate with income. Of nonelderly Southeast Asian Americans, 44% are poor or near poor.⁴ Because of the high cost of health care, many Southeast Asian Americans cannot afford to pay for health care. Provisions ensuring affordable healthcare and the expansion of Medicaid are a necessary part of reform.
- **Language Access** – Compared with 4% of the total U.S. population, 32% of Cambodian, 35% of Hmong, 32% of Laotian and 45% of Vietnamese Americans are linguistically isolated.⁵ Language barriers often impede access to health care, so reform must address language needs and access.
- **Cultural Competency** – It is important for medical staff and physicians to understand the diversity of their patients. Cultural competency is key in ensuring that all community members are able to access health care that addresses their needs.
- **Data Disaggregation** – Southeast Asian Americans are often lumped into broader racial categories or sometimes, even into an “other” category, making it difficult to see the real health needs of the communities. By collecting health data on specific ethnic groups, we may better understand the health needs of Southeast Asian American and find resources to address these health needs.

4. What do these common health policy terms that we keep hearing about mean?

- **Health Insurance Exchange/Gateway** – An option where the uninsured and small businesses can purchase public and private health plans. Insurance companies would also have to follow rules, including not discriminating against someone because they have a history of illness also known as pre-existing conditions.
- **Public Plan Option** – A government run health plan that is part of the Health Insurance Exchange/Gateway which creates a public health insurance option where individuals can choose between the health plan that their employer gives them or the government run public health plan.
- **Five year waiting period for immigrants** – Many legal immigrants are barred from participating in Medicaid and other government health programs for the first five years after they arrive in the U.S.

5. How can I get involved?

Ensure that the health needs of your community are heard! Contact your members of Congress and let them know about health issues in your community and what you want to see in health care reform. You can find contact information for your senators and house member at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov or call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask for the office of your senator and/or house member.

6. Where can I get more information about health care reform?

- Asian Pacific Islander Health Forum – www.apiahf.org
- Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations – www.aapcho.org
- National Immigrant Law Center (immigrant inclusion in health care) – www.nilc.org
- Cover the Uninsured, A Project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – covertheuninsured.org

7. Where can I find side-by-side comparisons of the different health bills?

- The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Side-by-Side Comparison of Major Health Care Reform Proposals*: www.kff.org/healthreform/upload/healthreform_sbs_full.pdf
- New York Times, *Comparing the Health Care Proposals*: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/08/12/us/politics/0812-plan-comparison.html

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⁴ Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum. Coverage. <http://www.apiahf.org/index.php/component/content/article/113.html>

⁵ Primary Source: Census 2000, Southeast Asian American Statistical Profile. SEARAC. <http://www.searac.org/seastatprofilemay04.pdf>