



Board of Health
San Juan County

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February 11, 2020

Over the course of the past year the San Juan County Board of Health has discussed concerns with the current state of the health care system. This has resulted in the Board reviewing and authorizing the following letter detailing our concerns and a request to explore a Single-payer Health Care System.

Health care for residents of San Juan County is unaffordable for many and unsustainable into the future as costs continue to escalate regionally and nationally. We have a non-system that places profits for corporate stakeholders above the needs of patients and families.

Here we have experienced closure of our only nursing home (dependent as it was on underfunded Medicaid), pressure on our rural pharmacies from pharmacy benefit managers, denial of some air medevac services, and limitations on mental health care. Our two rural clinics on Orcas and Lopez islands are so underfunded that they cannot provide after-hours continuity of care.

Nationally, the current profit-driven “system” is also unsustainable without major financing reform. Today, there are still more than 28 million Americans without health insurance, despite enactment of the Affordable Care Act ten years ago, plus another 87 million underinsured. Some 45,000 Americans die every year from lack of health insurance and access to care. Even as private health insurance covers less each year, its costs have gone up by more than 50 percent over the last ten years, compared to increases of 21 percent and 12 percent for Medicare and Medicaid, respectively. The government already pays about 60 percent of the nation’s health care costs, including \$685 billion a year to prop up the private insurance industry.

A Single-payer Health Care System can directly remedy these problems by bringing universal access to comprehensive health care, even including long-term care, for all Americans with full choice of physicians, hospitals and other providers.

- We will all pay into this program through progressive taxes; however, we will

pay much less than we do now when we take into account insurance premiums, co-pays, deductibles, and unexpected charges which will be eliminated.

- We can afford this by huge cost savings through administrative savings, bulk purchasing, simplified billing, negotiated fees, and global annual budgets for hospitals and other facilities.

- Our new system will be based on medical need and a service ethic, not ability to pay whereby so many Americans are left out.

Healthcare is fundamental to human life, and as such, is a right and not a privilege based on ability to pay, and should be available to all regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income, age or disability.

As a County Board of Health responsible for improving health care for our residents and with awareness of increasingly unsustainable system problems, it is our obligation to take what steps we can to address these problems. Our support for a resolution calling for A Single-payer Health Care System, as represented by two bills in Congress (S-1129 in the Senate and H. R. 1384 in the House of Representatives) can have a positive ripple effect across our region and country to the benefit of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Dale Heisinger, MD Chair
San Juan County Board of Health