



BARACK OBAMA AND JOE BIDEN: QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE FOR FIRST AMERICANS

Barack Obama and Joe Biden are committed to honoring health care treaty obligations to tribal nations. Perhaps more than any other group, American Indians understand that our health care system must be reformed and that disparities that affect American Indians – including significantly higher rates of diabetes and tuberculosis, and lower life expectancy¹ – must be addressed and eliminated. Obama and Biden will work with tribal nations to ensure that all First Americans receive affordable, accessible health care services.

In contrast, John McCain has consistently voted against funding for Indian Health Services.² He does not understand that health care is a treaty obligation. He also has called for freezing all domestic discretionary funding for one year, which would delay necessary improvements and funding increases for an under-resourced IHS.³ The McCain health care plan is a “radical deconstruction” of American health care⁴ that dismantles our employer-based health care system upon which many Native Americans rely for coverage,⁵ forces more Americans into the individual insurance market where they have to fend for themselves, and raises taxes on tens of millions of families.⁶ And John McCain’s opposition to expanding Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) also underscore that John McCain does not understand the concerns of American Indians.⁷

THE OBAMA-BIDEN PLAN TO IMPROVE FIRST AMERICAN HEALTH CARE

Support Indian Health Services: Barack Obama will provide increased support for the Indian Health Service. He voted in the Senate to provide an additional \$1 billion for IHS to address American Indian health disparities. Additionally, he was an original cosponsor of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 2007 which mandates modernization of the Indian health care system and strengthens urban Indian health facilities. Obama has fought against the Bush Administration’s attempt to eliminate urban health care for Indians not living in reservation communities. Obama opposed a federal land acquisition program that would have diverted funds from the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and the Alcohol and Substance Abuse program. Obama and Biden support sufficient funding for IHS and proper staffing and maintenance for IHS facilities.

Expand Medicaid and SCHIP: All too often the Indian Health Service, states, and tribes are not working together to include eligible American Indians in Medicaid and SCHIP. As part of their comprehensive health care plan, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand eligibility for the Medicaid and SCHIP programs and ensure that these programs continue to serve their critical safety net function and work at all levels of government to ensure greater communication. Medicaid programs currently provide health insurance cover to over 22 percent of American Indian adults, and 46 percent of American Indian children.⁸ The Obama-Biden plan will help ensure that low and moderate-income American Indians receive adequate health care coverage.

Support Disease Management Programs: Over seventy-five percent of total health care dollars are spent on patients with one or more chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure.⁹ Many patients with chronic diseases benefit greatly from disease management programs, which help patients manage their condition and get the care they need.¹⁰ American Indians suffer from chronic diseases like diabetes at a much higher rate than the national average.¹¹ Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work with tribes and require that all-federally supported programs, including Indian Health Services, utilize proven disease management

programs. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also help providers to put in place care management programs and encourage team care through implementation of medical home-type models that will improve coordination and integration of care of those with chronic conditions.

Tackle Health Care Disparities: Although all Americans are affected by problems with our health care delivery system, an overwhelming body of evidence demonstrates that certain populations, including American Indians, are significantly more likely to receive lower quality health care than others. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will tackle the root causes of health disparities by addressing differences in access to health coverage and promoting prevention and public health, both of which play a major role in addressing disparities. They will also challenge the medical system to eliminate inequities in health care by requiring hospitals and health plans to collect, analyze and report health care quality for underserved populations and holding them accountable for any differences found; to diversify the workforce to ensure culturally effective care; to implement and fund evidence-based interventions, such as patient navigator programs; and support and expand the capacity of safety-net institutions, which provide a disproportionate amount of care for underserved populations with inadequate funding and technical resources.

Affordable, Accessible Coverage for First Americans: In addition to providing greater support for IHS, the Obama-Biden plan will also improve our current private and public insurance system, upon which many American Indians rely, and will leave Medicare intact for older and disabled Americans. Under the Obama-Biden plan, First Americans who have coverage today will be able to maintain their current coverage, have access to new affordable options, and see the quality of their health care improve and their costs go down. The Obama-Biden plan will provide new affordable health insurance options by guaranteeing eligibility for all health insurance plans, regardless of pre-existing or chronic conditions; creates a National Health Insurance Exchange to help American Indians and small businesses purchase affordable private health insurance; and provides new tax refundable credits to families who cannot afford health insurance and to small businesses with a new Small Business Health Tax Credit.

Paid for by Obama for America

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¹ Indian Health Services, Indian Health Disparities Fact Sheet, <http://info.ihs.gov/Disparities.asp>

² SCR 95, Vote #52, 3/11/04; HR 2361, Vote #163, 6/29/05; SCR 83, Vote #61, 3/16/06

³ John McCain Campaign Website, <http://www.johnmccain.com/Issues/JobsforAmerica/reform.htm>; Discretionary Funding: IHS, <http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/BudgetFormulation/documents/IHS%20Funding%20Overview.pdf>

⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2007, <http://www.kff.org/minorityhealth/upload/6069-02.pdf>

⁶ "John McCain's Radical Health Care Plan for America", Center for American Progress Action Fund, Sept. 2008, <http://wonkroom.thinkprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/paper.pdf>

⁷ United States Senate vote #307, 8/2/07,

http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=110&session=1&vote=00307; CNN.com, 10/3/07, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/10/03/mccain.interview/>;

⁸ Families USA, Sept. 2008, <http://www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/minority-health-and-the-census-numbers.pdf>

⁹ Gerard Anderson, Robert Herbert, Timothy Zeffiro, and Nikia Johnson *Chronic Conditions: Making the Case for Ongoing Care* (2004). Partnership for Solutions (Johns Hopkins and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation).

¹⁰ Center on an Aging Society at Georgetown University, *Disease Management Programs: Improving Health and while Reducing Costs?* at 4, (January 2004). <http://hpi.georgetown.edu/agingsociety/pdfs/management.pdf>

¹¹ Indian Health Services, Indian Health Disparities Fact Sheet, <http://info.ihs.gov/Disparities.asp>