

High speed wireless internet is here.

- ✓ FREE Month
- ✓ FREE Activation
- ✓ Shipping Included

ONLINE ONLY

CLEAR™
clear.com

GET CLEAR

★ **chron** | Viewpoints, Outlook

NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE TRAVEL BLOGS JOBS HOMES CARS CLASSIFIED



37 Comments

3 Recommend

Recommend

After 45 years, Medicare needs support

By CHRISTINE ADAMS
HOUSTON CHRONICLE
July 29, 2010, 7:39PM

Share

- Del.icio.us
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Email
- Digg
- Yahoo! Buzz
- StumbleUpon

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Today marks the 45th birthday of Medicare, the public insurance program that guarantees basic medical coverage to all seniors and people with severe disabilities regardless of their income, health status or where they live.

In Texas, Medicare covers just under 3 million Americans. The breakdown by race is 60.7 percent white, 24.9 percent Hispanic, 11.7 percent black and 2.6 percent "other." Of those Texans covered, 84.2 percent are seniors and 15.3 percent are disabled.

Medicare enjoys popular support despite the initial bitter resistance to passing it. Before its enactment, the elderly were at high risk for falling into poverty because most people had health insurance through their employer. Upon retirement, many had difficulties paying for medical care.

Over the years, the program has expanded. You are probably unaware that the Medicare program also pays for much of the

durable equipment for many hospitals. It also funds the vast majority of residency training in the United States, including resident physician salaries and benefits, and gives subsidies to teaching hospitals in exchange for training resident physicians.

The president's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform is considering cuts to the Medicare program. We are told that the purpose of the cuts in Medicare (and to Social Security as well) would be to reduce the national deficit and protect the nation's financial health. One has to ask: Are health care and insurance against poverty for seniors and the disabled no longer priorities for our society? And if Medicare is cut, where would the money come from to educate our future physicians and other health professionals?

Rather than cut Medicare, if we want to dramatically reduce health care costs and thus lower our national debt, we need to build on what works and expand to a "Medicare for All" national health insurance program. Every other industrialized nation has some form of national health insurance. They pay half as much per person, cover everyone and have as good or better overall medical outcomes than we do. According to both the World Health Organization and the Commonwealth Fund, our overall rankings are still at the bottom or near bottom when compared to other industrialized nations despite that fact that we spend twice as much.

How can these democratic nations spend so much less yet have such high-quality care? It's because none have for-profit private health plans that play central roles in financing health care. They are able to put a higher percentage of their health care dollars to actual health care because they are not paying for the waste and profiteering associated with the "middleman" private health insurance industry.

Medicare operates as a single-payer health care system with administrative costs of just 4 percent to 6 percent compared with for-profit health insurance administrative costs of between 16 percent and 26.5 percent. In a "Medicare for All" program, administrative savings would amount to about \$400 billion each year by eliminating unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy. That's enough to provide high-quality health care for every American and end co-pays and deductibles. Americans could go to any provider they wished to see. And, as with Medicare,

the majority of health providers and hospitals would remain private and could receive fair reimbursements for their services.

So celebrate the birthday of Medicare (and Social Security on Aug. 14) and reflect on their lessons for today: that we have a social contract to care for our fellow citizens and we can save money if we fulfill it with a national health program. Tell the debt commission, "No cuts to Medicare. Expand it to all of us."

Adams is a licensed psychologist and statewide secretary for Health Care for All Texas.

Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's [terms and conditions](#) of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Houston Chronicle. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification.

You must be logged in to comment. [Login](#) | [Sign up](#)

Comment



(0)

kyrawolfe wrote:

I'm not sure how genuine the requests are from commentors for references that support statements that other countries with national health programs are really doing better than us - but for those requesting facts not opinions here are sources citing research data supporting how other nations are spending less and getting more out of their health care systems.

Start with the Commonwealth Fund latest report on dismal rankings for the U.S. Health Care system: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: How the Performance of the U.S. Health Care System Compares Internationally, 2010

Update <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Fund-Reports/2010/Jun/Mirror-Mirror-Update.aspx>

<http://www.commonwealthfund.org> - (The Commonwealth Fund is a private foundation whose stated purpose is to promote a high performing health care system that achieves better.)
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) www.oecd.org - OECD regularly publishes data on comparative data on countries

Even the British Conservative Party supports their National Health Program:

The British Conservative Party's official position on health care direct from their website:

"Over three years ago David Cameron spelled out his priorities in three letters – NHS. As the party of the NHS, we will never change the idea at the heart of our NHS – that healthcare in this country is free at the point of use and available to everyone based on need, not ability to pay. "

http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Health.aspx

Then read what real Canadians say:

<http://www.rabble.ca/news/2009/09/new-rabble-page-canadians-clear-health-care-myths-americans>

Or visit the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation

http://www.chsrf.ca/mythbusters/index_e.php

Or Start with these two books:

T.R. Reid, Healing of America: (describes and compares four different models of national health programs around the world) or watch is documentary on Frontline: Sick Around the World.

Michael Gusmano, Health Care in World Cities compares New York, Paris, and London, provides insights into the possible effects of different health care systems on access to health care and the health of the populations.

These are but a few. The data overwhelmingly shows that it costs us twice as much to have health care for only some of our citizens just because we keep the "middleman" health insurance

companies in our system.

Oh- one reason malpractice costs are low in these countries with national health programs is that malpractice costs have to include the costs of future health care for the injured party. When a country has a national health program, all health care is paid for through the national program so does not have to be a part of the cash award to the injured party. That amounts to about 1/3 of the amount of the award.

7/30/2010 7:44:45 AM

Recommend: (19) (5)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



Mike_Houston wrote:

and automobiles will run on free magic dust given to us by the federal government. The federal deficit for the year is 1.4T. At this rate in a few years no one will have medicare except the politically correct.

7/30/2010 5:17:23 AM

(0)

Recommend: (19) (17)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



merryfoxworth wrote:

redseat, for the facts about Medicare for All look at

<http://www.healthcareforalltexas.org/FAQs.html> and <http://www.pnhp.org/facts/single-payer-faq>

(0)

They will give you plenty of real and measurable facts, not opinions.

A few points:

Malpractice suits are but a small fraction of health care costs. And with Medicare for All, you can choose any doctors you want and stay with them, not have severely limited choice and have to keep changing doctors when your employer changes your health plan. Choosing your doctors and being able to have a longer term relationship with them will build trust and reduce the propensity to sue them.

Yes, other industrialized nations' plans ARE far more right and efficient than our non-system of health care. They have achieved something rather remarkable, if not perfect: On little money, they have enabled EVERYBODY in the country to have access to basic health care, and NOBODY goes bankrupt over medical bills, as thousands and millions do here.

The UK is making a big mistake by going backwards into privatization.

7/30/2010 4:00:17 AM

Recommend: (19) (13)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



Mike_Houston wrote:

Merryfoxworth, you need to get a better education. Before healthcare ever existed, our ancestors were working and paying taxes. The federal deficit this year alone, is approximately \$5,000 per person in the USA. That would be \$10,000 for a married couple. After a couple of years, that would be \$20,000. Would you want that kind of debt. Well we are giving our children and grand-children that debt.

If you want health-care, get a job and pay for it. It isn't a right!

7/30/2010 7:00:42 AM

(0)

Recommend: (18) (14)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



hillcountry777 wrote:

There are several common threads between the Obamacare fiasco and this article which are attributable to brainwashing. First, by expanding any program to cover 20 times what it now covers is a recipe for disaster. You can't just add a few blocks to the original and have any success. What is more troubling and it was brought up by the admin and this author is their claim that all these huge piles of money that go to waste and fraud can be stopped but apparently only if the new system is put into place. Why is that?? If you know of waste or fraud, why not go after it now. You don't need health care reform to do that.

7/30/2010 6:50:07 AM

(60)

Recommend: (15) (14)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



(0)

healthcareforall wrote:

H.R. 4789 (buy into medicare act)
for those who want to pay at cost public health care can do so.
the rest can stay with their inefficient employer health insurance that takes 3 months to kick in!
7/31/2010 1:45:40 PM

Recommend: (1) (0)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



(0)

healthcareforall wrote:

MEDICARE FOR ALL!!
whether it is federal, state, or private non-profit i don't care.
H.R. 626(single payer) and H.R. 4789 (buy into medicare act) are two bills that need to be passed!
they have a point, health care is not a right, at least by constitutional standards.
but this fact alone is bankrupting us.
having lived, studied, and worked in europe and latin america for over 8 years.
their healthcare is by far, better for what they spend.
this is a fact, not my opinion.
i have healthcare here in the USA, i pay \$6,000 a year not including co-pays, etc.
for my wife is another \$6,000, to add kids is another \$4,000 each.
yet, i they go without health care because we can't afford it.
in England, we paid \$100 a month for private health care.
last time i went to the ER in the USA i waited 6hrs (i have insurance).
to get an appointment with my dentist i have to make reservations 6 months in advance, and if i need on the spot fixing... i have to call around to at least 6 dentists and then i have to wait 1-2 days to get to see them.
(i have dental insurance)
i believe dental care is also a human right, as it is related to health.
you will wait, wherever you go, regardless, get used to it.
the only difference with public health care, at least you can wait.
last but not least, if fire was privatized like health care, would a fireman come to your house and say... we can put out the fire in your kitchen but not your living room, and by the way show us your insurance.
while your family is burning in the living room...

7/31/2010 1:39:15 PM

Recommend: (1) (0)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



(1)

TroubleCominEveryday wrote:

Happy Birthday Medicare and soon you shall transcend to "improved" Medicare for all.
7/30/2010 11:39:26 PM

Recommend: (3) (0)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



(61)

TXPatriotGal wrote:

"Every other industrialized nation has some form of national health insurance. They pay half as much per person, cover everyone and have as good or better overall medical outcomes than we do."

Uh-huh, sure they do....

"Axe Falls on NHS Services" (July 24, 2010)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/7908742/Axe-falls-on-NHS-services.html>

"The Sunday Telegraph found the details of hundreds of cuts buried in obscure appendices to lengthy policy and strategy documents published by trusts. In most cases, local communities appear to be unaware of the plans. ...

Katherine Murphy, of the Patients Association, said the cuts were "astonishingly brutal" and expressed particular concern at moves to ration operations such as hip and knee operations. ...

"Some of the most common operations — including hip replacements and cataract surgery — will be rationed as part of attempts to save billions of pounds, despite government promises that front-line services would be protected.

Patients' groups have described the measures as "astonishingly brutal".

An investigation by The Sunday Telegraph has uncovered widespread cuts planned across the NHS, many of which have already been agreed by senior health service officials. They include:

- * Restrictions on some of the most basic and common operations, including hip and knee replacements, cataract surgery and orthodontic procedures.

- * Plans to cut hundreds of thousands of pounds from budgets for the terminally ill, with dying cancer patients to be told to manage their own symptoms if their condition worsens at evenings or weekends.

- * The closure of nursing homes for the elderly.

- * A reduction in acute hospital beds, including those for the mentally ill, with targets to discourage GPs from sending patients to hospitals and reduce the number of people using accident and emergency departments.

- * Tighter rationing of NHS funding for IVF treatment, and for surgery for obesity.

- * Thousands of job losses at NHS hospitals, including 500 staff to go at a trust where cancer patients recently suffered delays in diagnosis and treatment because of staff shortages.

- * Cost-cutting programmes in paediatric and maternity services, care of the elderly and services that provide respite breaks to long-term carers. ...

"Looking at these kinds of cuts, which trusts have drawn up in such secrecy, it particularly worries me how far they disadvantage the elderly and the vulnerable.

"We cannot return to the days of people waiting in pain for years for a hip operation or having to pay for operations privately."

She added that it was "incredibly cruel" to draw up savings plans based on denying care to the dying. ...

As well as sending more patients home to die, the paper said the savings would be made by admitting fewer terminally ill cancer patients to hospital because they were struggling to cope with symptoms such as pain. Instead, more patients would be given advice on "self management" of their condition."

7/30/2010 9:10:55 PM

Recommend: (1) (4)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



(0)

TXCathy3 wrote:

Thanks to Dr. Adams & Health Care For All Texas for reminding us on the 45th Birthday of Medicare. For nearly 100 yrs, beginning with TeddyRoosevelt in 1912, universal, NOT for profit health care has been proposed to meet the social & economic need of all the American people. I liked LizGurlyFlynn's historical notes & references. I just signed up as constituent representative on www.MedicareForAll.org. Good idea to build a base of support by Congressional Districts & document the will of the people (vs the industry).

MoveOn.org & other nat'l orgs are challenging the "budget deficit" (false) notions of cutting Social Security, Medicaid & Medicare. see www.Hands Off Our Medicare". Watch out- another gun is coming to our heads from the corporate rulers with fears & lies in order to permit further human injustice.

The best way out of this health system mess is HR 676, single payer plan, expanding Medicare. The policy wonks have already done the math. ONE system could eliminate 31cents on every dollar wasted on private health insurance bureaucracy. \$400billion! captured savings & deliver comprehensive, high quality, health care to everyone. Yep, President & Congress too. NO separate plans, no more multiple PROFIT making crooks. Do you believe that health care is a privilege? Mike_Houston obviously does. Refer to the preamble in the Constitution of the USA. ...Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

7/30/2010 8:59:08 PM

Recommend: (5) (0)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

☆ DoGood.chron.com

Won't you
please help?

good
fellows
HOUSTON CHRONICLE



[Read all comments \(37\) »](#)

[Online Divorce Papers](#)

Prepare your own divorce documents today.
www.DivorceWriter.com

[Jim Cramer's Trust Was up 31% in 2009](#)

Today only: Peek inside his portfolio for
www.thestreet.com

[Invest in Gold - Learn How with Free Kit](#)

Gold Delivered to Your Door Since 1960.
Goldline.com/Gold

[Make Less Than \\$45,000/Year?](#)

You May Qualify for a Grant to Go Back to
www.SeeCollegeDegrees.com/Grants

Ads by Yahoo!

<p>CHRON</p> <p>Home Houston & Texas Nation Business Sports Entertainment Life Travel Corrections Blogs</p> <p>Weather Chron Commons Traffic</p> <p>TOPICS</p> <p>Small Business PetsHouston MomHouston HoustonBelief Gardening 29-95</p>	<p>NEIGHBORHOODS</p> <p>Aldine/North Houston Alief/Southwest Bellaire/West U/River Oaks Clear Lake Conroe Cy-Fair East End/Third Ward Fort Bend Heights/Neartown Katy</p> <p>Kingwood Humble/Lake Houston Memorial/Spring Branch Pasadena/Baytown Pearland area Spring/Klein Tomball Magnolia The Woodlands</p>	<p>MARKETPLACE</p> <p>Jobs Homes Cars Classifieds Place a classified ad Place a retail ad Contests</p>
<p>LOCAL SERVICES</p> <p>Houston Attorneys Houston Salons</p>		

[Privacy statement](#) | [Terms of service](#) | [About Our Ads](#)
Copyright © 2010 The Houston Chronicle

HEARST newspapers