



## Capitol Hill Watch | Health Care Forum Discusses Role of Chronic Disease Management in Health Reform

[Apr 08, 2009]

A bipartisan group of panelists on Tuesday at a health care forum agreed that managing and preventing chronic disease is essential to controlling health care costs and is necessary to achieve comprehensive health care reform, the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) reports. The forum, sponsored by the advocacy group [America's Agenda](#), featured former [HHS](#) Secretary Tommy Thompson and former House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.).

According to the *Sentinel*, the forum focused on the relatively "easy issues" in health care reform, such as encouraging healthier lifestyles, managing chronic illnesses, utilizing health information technology and restructuring the incentives in the health care system. The forum "touched just occasionally on the tough issues," including expanding health care coverage to uninsured people and changing the way hospitals and physicians are paid, the *Sentinel* reports.

Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.) said, "Nothing as big and emotional and costly as health care (reform) is going to be easy," adding that large scale systematic change will take time but that "there's a lot of low-hanging fruit" (Boulton, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 4/7).

### 'Medical Home' Approach to Managed Care Gains Popularity

Many lawmakers -- particularly Democrats -- who are "intent on containing the nation's spiraling health costs" while drafting health care overhaul legislation are promoting the "medical home" approach to managed care, the [Boston Globe](#) reports. A medical home pays primary care physicians to coordinate a patient's care and grants bonuses to those providers who meet quality standards and facilitate cost reductions through their attentiveness.

Supporters of the medical home model contend that it creates healthier people who in turn are less likely to use costly emergency department and hospital facilities. In addition, they say that physicians providing medical home care can better track patients' medical records, preventing duplicate tests and additional unnecessary expenditures. Under the medical home model, physicians are seen as "guides" to patients, helping them find cost-effective treatment, instead of as "gatekeepers" who limit access to specialists, the *Globe* reports.

[Senate Finance Committee](#) Chair Max Baucus (D-Mont.) [highlighted](#) the medical home model in his [plan](#) to overhaul the U.S. health care system, which he unveiled last fall. In addition, the medical home model was a key topic in a meeting last month between industry leaders and Nancy-Ann DeParle, director of the White House Office for Health Reform (Wangness, *Boston Globe*, 4/8).

### NPR Examines Disagreement Over Public Plan Option

NPR's "[All Things Considered](#)" on Tuesday examined the ongoing debate over whether to create a government-sponsored health care option to compete with private insurance. Many Republicans contend that a government run program similar to Medicare would be unfair to private insurers in the marketplace. However, President Obama has said that a public option would create more competition. The piece highlights a recent [study](#) by the [Lewin Group](#) that

found a public health care option.

Jacob Hacker, the Berkeley political scientist who first popularized the notion of a public health care option, said that the intent of the concept was never to do away with private insurers, noting, "We have to make sure the rules are fair." While Obama and Democratic lawmakers have discussed limiting a public insurance option only to small-business workers, the self-insured and those ineligible for workplace coverage, many Republicans are worried that the option could grow tremendously (Rovner, "All Things Considered," NPR, 4/7).

[http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily\\_reports/rep\\_index.cfm?DR\\_ID=57918](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=57918)