

HEALTH CARE

Texas Democrats continue to believe healthcare is a fundamental human right for all Texans and not a privilege reserved for those able to afford it. Texas Democrats oppose the repeated efforts by Republican politicians to repeal the Affordable Care Act and return America to the disastrous system that has failed small businesses, working families and drained state and family budgets. Every family deserves quality healthcare they can count on and a secure and stable system that ensures access to affordable medical care. Texans deserve a Texas Solution to fix our medical coverage gap - a solution that should also consider a single payer option.

In order to address critical health care needs, Texas Democrats:

- support accepting the over \$100 billion in federal dollars available to provide Medicaid coverage to the hard working families that have been denied health care by the state's Republican leaders;
- support guaranteed access to affordable, comprehensive universal coverage for all United States citizens and legal residents;
- support creation of an insurance marketplace where small business owners can receive the same buying power that big businesses have while receiving tax credits to make employee coverage more affordable and dependable;
- support the creation of an efficient and robust Texas based health insurance exchange where Texans can access affordable, quality health insurance plans;
- believe the state must realize all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars available to fund healthcare costs, including enforcement of existing charity care requirements;
- oppose discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price and believe insurance companies should not be allowed to violate the protections of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by finding new ways to deny coverage;

- believe medical decisions regarding treatment options should be made by physicians in consultation with patients, not by an insurance company or government lay people;
- support policies to ensure every Texas child has health insurance;
- support research into stem cell therapies and state funding for research in our state's public universities;
- support funding for needle exchange programs in at risk communities;
- support protecting Texans from the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure in workplaces including bars and restaurants; and
- that the most efficient and universal and adequate way to provide health care is through a single payer system.

Prevention

The underlying philosophy of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is to move our country forward to a preventive based system where a priority is placed on the health and wellness of all Americans. Democrats support the legislation's elimination of copayments for preventive services, as well as plans to expand community health centers and the number of primary care physicians and healthcare practitioners. Democrats support efforts in Texas to increase the number of primary care physicians and nurses, as well efforts to encourage healthy living. Texas Democrats support reducing childhood obesity, as well as promoting vaccinations and immunizations.

Protecting and Improving Medicaid

Texas Democrats join a long list of Texas business associations and local governments in support of a Texas Solution for Medicaid expansion. We believe that accepting the billions of federal dollars for the state's Medicaid program can provide coverage to those working Texans that fall between the cracks and are denied or cannot afford private coverage. It would keep those working Texans out of the emergency room where they often cannot afford to pay their bills and would stop those costs from being passed on to Texans through higher insurance premiums and property taxes.

In order to protect and improve Medicaid, Texas Democrats:

- reject attempts by Republican officials to cut existing Medicaid services;
- support increasing reimbursement rates for physicians;
- believe cuts to Medicaid reimbursement rates for children's therapy services like physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy limit our ability to provide care to children who need it most;
- support working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to transition away from the 1115 waiver towards real long-term funding solutions;
- support the inclusion of a "Single Payer Option" as an addition to the plans currently offered under the state exchange systems
- support changes to the Affordable Care Act in relation to the "Cadillac Tax" language to be a credit as opposed to a deduction, which would provide for tax relief as opposed to a floating type deduction;
- support the rights of workers to be able to collectively bargain for good dependable healthcare for its members, members' families and retirees.

- support the inclusion of severe penalties on corporations and businesses who would manipulate costs on healthcare contributions could being used as financial revenue stream.

Improving Medicare

Democrats support the security for seniors that the Medicare programs has delivered for decades. Democrats support the Medicare provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that provide improved quality of care, increase services to rural areas, crack down on waste and abuse and ensure more money goes to benefits and not insurance providers. Democrats support the Medicare reforms enacted by Democrats in Congress to close the costly prescription drug “donut hole” that burdened seniors.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

We support the new coverage now allowed for by the Affordable Care Act for mental health and substance abuse services as well as to encourage Texas to accept the Federal Medicaid dollars and deliver coverage to those Texans living in the coverage gap that has been denied coverage by Republican leaders.

We support:

- A robust continuum of care that offers choices in community-based supports that meet the range of needs that individuals with mental health needs present with. these should include peer operated services, community drop in centers, psychosocial rehabilitation, access to a range of vocational supports including supported employment, and supported housing.
- Ways to eliminate stigma surrounding mental illness and substance abuse.
- Ways to increase access to mental health and substance abuse services by increasing the number of treatment facilities while ensuring their financial viability.
- Medicare policies for psychiatric and psychological care to provide an increase of session times beyond the follow-up sessions currently allowed. We also support federal government initiatives increasing Medicaid funding for substance abuse treatment (medication assisted and counseling) which allow individuals to have access to outpatient treatment. Intensive outpatient treatment would become more cost effective.
- Encouraging more “reality-based” substance abuse education at all school levels. The Court system must be encouraged to allow treatment as the first option for drug offenders when appropriate, rather than incarceration. Outpatient treatment includes counseling and medication management to be less costly than incarceration. We support community-based mental health services for children and adults.
- Qualitative evaluation of all treatment modalities, interventions, agency and individual providers so that proven, efficacious treatments - administered by the most qualified providers - are utilized to improve significantly the lives of service recipients.
- Sufficient private non-profit, state and federal funding for evaluation research and provider training to rank Texas number 1 in mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services in the nation.

Education and Services to Prevent and Treat Communicable Infections

Texas Democrats support increased education initiatives and services to address prevention and treatment of communicable diseases, such as Viral Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and Tuberculosis. Effective treatment and therapy for all communicable diseases improves the quality of life and encourages a return to the workforce.

Texas Democrats:

- Support coordination with federal officials toward a goal of expanding the Ryan White CARE Act and the Act's attendant and complementary programs, such as AIDS Drug Assistance Program and Housing Opportunities for Persons With HIV/AIDS;
- Support the elimination of the out-dated ban on non-celibate gay men donating blood and apply a uniform, non-discrimination policy;
- Support President Barack Obama's national HIV/AIDS strategy to expanding access to mental health and substance abuse services;
- Oppose state cuts to HIV services in favor of high spending on abstinence-only programs; and
- Oppose Congressional reductions to discretionary funding for such programs in any future budget.

Eliminating Health Disparities

Health studies have long indicated disease and mortality does not uniformly impact everyone in our state. Millions of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Indigenous Peoples, and LGBTQ persons, living in America should not be disadvantaged by income, gender, region, immigration status, and discrimination. Texas Democrats:

- support efforts and programs focused on educating the community through early detection, highlighting the benefits of an active lifestyle and a healthy diet, and routine medical checkups to increase the likelihood of early detection.
- support efforts to ensure women are educated and have proper access to the best medicines, state-of-the-art prevention and treatment and detection techniques.
- oppose any politicization of providers of reproductive health services and closures to further limit health care access to women.
- support research, policy, and legislation to eliminate health disparities among racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, and other groups in order to enable all Texans to live longer healthier, and more productive lives.

Choice and Family Planning

Texas Democrats believe in the fundamental American values of freedom, privacy and personal responsibility. We believe in the right to make sound, responsible personal healthcare choices for ourselves and our families. Texas Democrats:

- trust the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their families, physicians, personal consciences, and/or their faith;
- support the repeal of HB2, which has created dangerous restrictions on Texans' access to abortion care, and oppose any future TRAP (targeted regulation of abortion providers) legislation;

- support preventive measures which have proven successful in reducing unintended pregnancies;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science and evidence-based data to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce high rates of teen pregnancy and repeat teen pregnancy in Texas, including the provision of evidence-based, accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component;
- recognize the product of a joined egg and sperm has no independent status, standing, entitlements or rights that would in any way usurp or supersede the rights of the mother or woman which are paramount;
- support the right of a woman to acquire contraception or other reproductive services through her health insurance provider;
- support resources for pregnant and parenting teens while encouraging them to continue their education and career development;
- support family planning funding for pregnancy prevention and preventive health care by all qualified providers in regulated, licensed medical facilities, including Planned Parenthood;
- support women's access to affordable prenatal, including pregnancy insurance and prenatal vitamins;
- support paid maternity and/or paternity leave;
- support women's access to accurate information about reproductive health, adoption and related resources;
- support affordable, quality childcare; and
- promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives.