

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney On New “Stand for Quality” Health Care Reform Recommendations March 24, 2009

The American people need relief from high health costs and health coverage for the uninsured. The AFL-CIO, along with our affiliated unions representing 12 million active workers and three million retirees, believes that achieving these twin goals will require major changes in how health care is delivered. Care delivery must become more transparent, patient-focused, devoted to continuous quality improvement anchored in medical science, and committed to achieving higher value through greater efficiency.

A national, standardized measurement, reporting and improvement system is an essential building block for the high-value health care system envisioned by a wide range of organizations.

Stand for Quality, a diverse coalition of more than 160 groups across the health care spectrum, released recommendations today which offer much-needed benchmarks and direction for the Administration and Congress on how the quality of care can be substantially improved while at the same time achieving savings. Such a rigorous approach to improving quality is the only viable path to a more cost-effective health care system over the long-term. Research shows that savings in health care stem from higher quality care delivered in a more efficient and effective manner.

In order to do this, we must accelerate progress in medical science, update treatments based on that progress, and rigorously apply what is learned in the care process. At the same time, clinicians must maintain the flexibility to tailor high-quality evidence-based care to the needs of individual patients.

The lessons from the measurement and quality improvement work to date are clear. They include:

- Quality can be measured;
- If quality is measured, it can be improved;
- Once quality data is available, clinicians will use it to improve care processes;
- Restructuring care delivery for higher quality requires greater efficiency;
- Together they can achieve sustainable savings in health care;
- The wide variation in care practices and costs can be reduced or even eliminated.

Quality improvement based on measurement is still in its infancy. And today's recommendations highlight the importance of public investments in quality measurement and improvement.

Much more remains to be done, including focusing on chronic illnesses early and treating them properly to avoid costly complications, and developing measures across episodes of care.

On behalf of AFL-CIO affiliated unions that collectively bargain health benefits for some 40 million people, we support the Stand for Quality recommendations and commit ourselves to working with all other parties in health care towards the best possible care for working families.

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