

Washington, DC - U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius today released a new report on health disparities in America- [Health Disparities: A Case for Closing the Gap](#)

The report highlights disparities that plague our health system. For example, 40 percent of low income Americans do not have health insurance. Introduced today, the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2009, outlines the priorities for healthcare reform--particularly the need to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities that exist under the current healthcare system.

“We can not ignore the short-comings of our health care system,” said Rep. Gonzalez. “As an economic and moral imperative, reform is necessary to ensure affordable, quality health care for ALL Americans-regardless of race or ethnicity. With over 47 million uninsured, reforming our health care system and offering a public health care option is a moral responsibility.”

According to today’s report, the United States spends more than any other nation in the world on health care – in 2007 we spent \$2.2 trillion. Despite consistent increases in spending, disparities among demographic groups persist.

“Today's rising health care costs are hurting families across the nation. Our health care reform legislation would contain costs, while creating the avenues to provide our families with the care they deserve,” added Rep. Gonzalez. “We must remember insurance alone does not equal quality health care. Our best solution is to integrate reform into the entire system and provide

unequivocal accessibility, ensuring those communities that are hardest hit by the health inequities are taken care of.”

The report went on to say low-income adults and children struggle to obtain routine but needed care that serves to prevent the occurrence of more serious health problems. Twenty percent of low-income Hispanic youth have gone a year without a health care visit – a rate three times higher than that for high-income Whites.

“As we move forward with health care reform we must ensure disparities are done away with, while maintaining and protecting the methods that have worked. Not doing so will cost our nation more in the long run. Sebelius’ report released today clearly demonstrates low-income Americans and racial and ethnic minorities experience disproportionately higher rates of disease, fewer treatment options, and reduced access to care. It is time to change that and the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2009 is a significant step in the right direction.”

The report also notes that about one-third of the uninsured have a chronic disease, and they are six times less likely to receive care for a health problem than the insured. In contrast, only 6 percent of high income Americans lack insurance.