



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

OPINION: Let's Make Health Reform Work for Arizona

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Arizona has the chance to shape our health care as we make decisions and plans to implement federal health care reform. As a state, we face a great deal of work, but also immense new opportunities, and it's time for Arizona's legislature to roll up their sleeves.

Unfortunately, State Senator Sylvia Allen used the first meeting of her Ad Hoc Committee on Impacts of Federal Health Care Reform Implementation to complain about the new federal law rather than to explore ways of making it work for the people of Arizona. After more than three hours of testimony, including health insurance lobbyists, a tax attorney, and the Governor's attorney, she adjourned the hearing without taking the public testimony that was on the agenda. Children's Action Alliance, Raising Special Kids, and Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition were among the organizations that were present and requested to testify. A mother of a child with a special health need, who was dropped from their health insurance due to a pre-existing condition, also signed in to testify during public comments. After taking half a day off of work, she was unable to share her story with Senators.

While this exclusion of public testimony was certainly disrespectful, it was also dangerous. Our lawmakers cannot expect to make good decisions for the children, families, and economy of Arizona if they close their ears and minds to varied perspectives and real life information.

Last week, for example, senators *didn't* hear that most of the costs of health reform are actually the costs of maintaining what the state is already doing. In fact, a decade before federal health reform, the voters of Arizona passed Proposition 204 with over 60% of the vote, requiring AHCCCS to provide health insurance to all citizens and legal residents with incomes below the poverty level. Governor Brewer stated in her own budget proposal earlier this year, before health reform passed, that eliminating the Proposition 204 population from AHCCCS was not legally an option for the legislature unless they went back to the voters for approval.

Now, some legislators want to blame federal health reform for these costs rather than acknowledge a responsibility to Arizona voters. In fact, under health reform, Arizona will get a better federal match for the Proposition 204 population that we already cover. This will allow the state to cover the same people under AHCCCS that we have already been covering for \$2.3 billion *less* than would have been the case if health reform had not passed.

Many other states, red and blue alike, are putting together task forces to implement health reform. Even other states that are suing over parts of the new law are preparing to implement it, and Arizona should too. Arizona has a long history of putting our own stamp on federal programs to make them successful for our state. We created our own unique Medicaid program, AHCCCS, which uses a private network of health insurers and providers to insure patients, and keeps average costs well below that of most other states while still providing high quality care.

Many decisions have to be made by Arizona regarding health reform. Now is the time to get to work, addressing opportunities and challenges, and not just ideology. Arizonans want to know how to enroll in the new coverage for people with pre-existing conditions and how to make sure their insurance companies don't wrongfully deny their claims or drop them from coverage when they get sick. We want to know how small businesses and uninsured adults will find affordable coverage in the coming years. And we want to know how 268,000 uninsured children will get covered if KidsCare remains frozen.

We ask all of our legislators we elect on November 2nd to engage the community, including those who struggle every day to find affordable health care that meets their needs. Together, let's build upon our past successes to make affordable, quality health care a reality for all Arizonans.