

Sample OP-ED Urging Congress to Pass Legislation Addressing Health Disparities

We are all equally American, so why aren't we all equally healthy? Racial and ethnic minority populations suffer from adverse health conditions and have less access to health care than non-minority U.S. populations. Disparities in disease, disability, and death for six key health conditions (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, breast/cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, immunization, and infant mortality) alone are enormous. Minority populations suffer 8 times as many deaths for these diseases than non-minority populations. It is time for American leaders to realize that we can no longer allow health disparities to exist in our Nation.

Despite dramatic achievements in health and healthcare over the past century, there exist evident racial/ethnic, rural/urban and socioeconomic disparities in health outcomes exacerbated by lack of insurance coverage, and access to and quality of health care. In the House of Representatives, Representative Hilda Solis (D-CA) introduced the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007, and in the Senate, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) has introduced the Minority Health Improvement and Health Disparity Elimination Act – both pieces of legislation seek to reduce and eventually eliminate disparities in health status.

Besides supporting these bills, there is a need for increased funding for the Office of Minority Health and the CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) 2010 program. The Office of Minority Health provides health promotion and disease prevention services that focus on health concerns that cause the high rate of disease in racial and ethnic minority communities. Despite the vital role OMH plays, the president has recommended cutting the program. The CDC's REACH 2010 program was implemented to help racial and ethnic minority communities support effective and sustainable programs that contribute to the elimination of the 6 major health disparities mentioned in the first paragraph. Currently the CDC funds 35 communities through the REACH program (including 4 elderly projects) and with additional funding the program will only be able to expand and help even more communities.

It is critical that Congress act to address the issue of health disparities this year. We cannot afford the social or economic costs associated with inadequate health and health care in the United States.

