



MINNESOTA CITIZENS FORUM ON HEALTH CARE COSTS

220 South Sixth Street, 600 Pillsbury Center South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

February 23, 2004

Dear Governor Pawlenty:

On behalf of the Leadership Panel members of the Minnesota Citizens Forum on Health Care Costs and the many Minnesotans who have shared their ideas, concerns and values through our Minnesota Dialogues process, I am pleased to submit to you this report, "Listening to Minnesotans: Transforming Minnesota's Health Care System."

The report reflects not only an enormous amount of work by all those involved, but a deep-seated desire by many Minnesotans to work together to create a better system of health care. The findings and conclusions in this report are a consensus not just of the Leadership Panel, but of Minnesotans from across our state.

I submit this report with some personal observations:

First, Minnesota is in the enviable position of being able to build on some enormous strengths in our health care system. Our state's uninsured rate of 5.4 percent is one of the lowest in the nation. Minnesotans consistently have ranked among the healthiest people in the country. Dramatic and immediate change is needed, but we start our journey in far better shape than many other states.

Second, many of the recommendations in this report call for partnerships – between government and employers, between purchasers and payers, between providers and consumers and on and on. Collaboration is a great Minnesota tradition. We can look at many of the strengths of our health system and see at their beginning an innovative partnership. How much more of a challenge would we face today if employers, government, payers and providers hadn't worked together in the late 1980s and early 1990s to make it easier and more affordable for small business to obtain health coverage for their workers or to create MinnesotaCare?

Third, the report cites many barriers to an affordable, accessible health system. One barrier is not mentioned, however, even though it may be the largest of them all. Too often, important reforms are stymied by the barrier of false choices. We pit individual privacy against the need to collect data about public health, even though we can do both. Tort reform is constructed as a choice between

safeguards on an error-prone system and the ability of providers to practice cost-effective, evidence-based medicine. We demand controls over rising health insurance premiums, yet reward political intervention in mandating benefits and treatments. Certainly, there will be difficult trade-offs and challenging choices as we take on the task of reforming the health system. But we are in this together. We need to frame choices in ways that reflect the common good.

Fourth, some will take the easy way out and dismiss the recommendations in this report by saying they are nothing new. In one sense, they are right. There is no one magic answer. We have known for years that greater consumer involvement in health care purchasing decisions, universal coverage and many of the other recommendations are essential to reforming the health system. As is so often the case in life, we know the right thing to do; the difficulty is in doing it. So it is with health care.

Having said that though, this report is new on two important fronts. First, it is the most comprehensive set of recommendations ever offered for reform. It connects the actions in a cohesive and clear action plan. Second, the recommendations are borne of public involvement. The recommendations aren't the work of those with a special-interest agenda to pursue. They are based on the values and principles of Minnesotans.

And that gets me to my fifth and most important observation. Minnesotans are ready for change. In many ways, the people of Minnesota are ahead of policy makers on health care reform. Minnesotans need more tools (especially information) to be full partners in health care reform, but they are ready for the challenge. They know change will be difficult and will require contributions from everyone, but they also know that we no longer can just tinker around the edges.

Change will be difficult. It will require hard work, political courage and a faith in the people of Minnesota. Taking on this challenge may seem overwhelming. Ignoring this challenge will be devastating. Delay no longer is an option. The time to act is now.

With that, it is great privilege to have been part of this process and a great honor to submit this report, "Listening to Minnesotans: Transforming Minnesota's Health Care System."

Sincerely,

David Durenberger, Chair