

**JOHN KERRY AND JOHN EDWARDS: A PLAN TO END
THE MINORITY HEALTH CRISIS**
Ensuring Health Care Access and Quality for Native Americans

John Kerry and John Edwards have a plan to address the minority health crisis and improve health insurance and quality health care for Native Americans – whether they live on reservations or in urban areas. Approximately 27.5 percent of Native Americans are without health care coverage – higher than that of any other racial group other than Hispanics. Lack of health care access translates to poor health outcomes—minority groups live sicker and die sooner from a host of acute and chronic diseases, including HIV/AIDS, asthma, obesity, diabetes, cancer and strokes. And, even those with health insurance are not guaranteed good health care because the quality of care for minority Americans—even those with health insurance—is worse than the quality of care for white Americans.

In the Senate, John Kerry and John Edwards were original cosponsors of the *Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act of 2003*, which aims to eliminate racial disparities in health care. A Kerry-Edwards administration will make minority health a national priority, support effective programs and interventions, and ensure that every American, regardless of their racial and ethnic background, is guaranteed access to quality health care.

The Plan: Kerry and Edwards will reduce health care disparities by:

- I. Increasing access to health care coverage
- II. Ensuring access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care
- III. Diversifying the health workforce
- IV. Collecting, analyzing and reporting health data by race, ethnicity, and primary language
- V. Investing in health promotion and disease prevention for minority communities

I. INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE COVERAGE. John Kerry and John Edwards are committed to increasing access to health care coverage for all Americans, including minority Americans. The average life expectancy for Native Americans is 71 years of age – nearly five years less than the rest of the U.S. population. But in spite of this need, the per capita expenditure for Native Americans is only one-third of the average annual expenditure for Medicaid assistance. In 2003, the federal government spent nearly \$6,000 for each Medicare recipient, and over \$3,800 for health care for each federal prisoner. Yet, in 2003, the federal government spent only approximately \$2,000 for Indian Health Service medical care per person. Approximately 27 percent of Native Americans are without health insurance. The Kerry-Edwards health care plan will extend coverage to 95% of Americans, including all children. Increasing health coverage will dramatically reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health care and improve minority health. As president, John Kerry will:

- ? Support reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act;
- ? Support meaningful increases for the Indian Health Service;
- ? Strengthen and expand Medicaid to provide a secure safety net that works for Native Americans;
- ? Strengthen Medicaid for our families and allow immigrant children and pregnant women to enroll in Medicaid;
- ? Expand the children's health program created under President Bill Clinton so no child goes without medical care;
- ? Offer individuals and businesses tax credits to make quality, reliable health coverage more affordable;
- ? Expand coverage for low income adults through existing federal-state health care programs; and
- ? Give all Americans access to the same coverage that members of Congress give themselves.
- ? Ensure that community health care centers have the financial resources they need to provide quality care.

II. ENSURE ACCESS TO CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE HEALTH CARE. Experts have concluded that cultural mismatch between patients and providers contribute to disparities in care. Kerry and Edwards will work to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate health care for all Americans. They will:

- ? **Support Cross-Cultural Education and Training.** Evidence has shown that cross-cultural education improves health outcomes. John Kerry will support cross-cultural education and training for health professionals and will work with accreditation bodies and licensure boards to include requirements for such training in graduate health programs. John Kerry will also fund existing cultural competence programs that have never received appropriations under the Bush Administration.
- ? **Provide Effective Language Services.** Over 46 million people – more than 17 percent of the U.S. population – speak a language other than English at home. Numerous studies have shown that language barriers lead to less use of primary and preventive services and greater use of emergency rooms for care. Effective language services

improve health care quality and health outcomes for these individuals, and reduce costs. John Kerry will work to help health care providers and institutions adhere to the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services. In addition, he will invest in research to improve interpretation and translation services.

- ? **Empower Minority Americans To Obtain Quality Health Care.** Minorities often face serious difficulties obtaining quality health care for a number of reasons, including unfamiliarity with the health care system, cultural barriers, and low health literacy. As president, John Kerry will support and expand initiatives that empower minority Americans, including patient navigator and community health worker programs and efforts to tailor existing health programs for minority patient populations and low health literacy populations.

III. DIVERSIFY THE HEALTH WORKFORCE. Although minorities comprise roughly one-third of the nation's population, African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians account for less than 10 percent of the nation's doctors, 12 percent of nurses, and 5 percent of dentists. Minority health professionals are significantly more likely to care for minority patients, as well as those that are low income and uninsured. Patients who share the same race or ethnicity as their provider report higher levels of satisfaction, participation in decisions involving their health, and use of health services and compliance.

John Kerry and John Edwards recognize the importance of a diverse workforce and fully support affirmative action policies and other strategies to remedy the dire shortage of minority health professionals. They will:

- ? **Support Title VII Training for Diversity Programs.** The Title VII diversity training programs were created to improve health care access in medically underserved areas and for indigent populations by increasing minority representation in the health professions. Yet George Bush proposed to cut Title VII by 90 percent. Kerry will restore this program and work to promote federal partnerships with state and local entities, as well as private entities, to reduce financial barriers that prevent many students of color from entering the health professions. Incentives for students include loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, loan repayment, and other activities.
- ? **Engage Key Stakeholders in Efforts to Increase Diversity.** The Institute of Medicine recommends that health professions schools, professional societies and accreditation bodies formulate and enforce policies that will increase the number of under-represented minorities throughout the health professions. As president, John Kerry will implement this recommendation through incentives and technical support, to reduce financial and other barriers to minority entry into the health professions.

IV. COLLECT, ANALYZE AND REPORT HEALTH DATA BY RACE, ETHNICITY AND PRIMARY LANGUAGE. High quality racial and ethnic health data allows for identification of disparities, interventions and accountability. Unfortunately, health data currently available by race and ethnicity, as well as data by income and language use, are extremely limited and of variable quality. John Kerry understands that "if you can't count it, it doesn't count". His plan will:

- ? Promote voluntary minority health data collection, analysis and reporting through Federal programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, and private entities
- ? Will work to improve the quantity and the quality of minority health data collected and reported.
- ? Promote greater involvement of minority investigators in clinical trials, which has been shown to overcome mistrust of data collection in minority communities.
- ? Work to make minority health data available in ways that help minority Americans to make informed decisions about their health care.

V. **INVEST IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION FOR MINORITY COMMUNITIES.** Substantial disparities in health between minority and white communities exist across the disease spectrum. Native Americans are 770 percent more likely to die from alcoholism, 650 percent more likely to die from tuberculosis, 420 percent more likely to die from diabetes, and 52 percent more likely to die from pneumonia or influenza than the rest of the United States, including white and minority populations.

John Kerry understands that prevention is the cornerstone to good health and long, productive lives for all Americans. He is committed to putting prevention first on his health agenda and will do the following:

- ? **Encourage Healthy Lifestyles.** Minority Americans are at significantly higher risk for poor nutrition, sedentary activities, and other risky behaviors which increase susceptibility for diseases that could be prevented or delayed, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. As president, John Kerry will work to implement interventions to promote healthy lifestyles among children and adults in schools, workplaces and communities.
- ? **Attack Environmental Hazards.** Minority children—especially African American, Hispanic and Native American children—are much more likely than white children to grow up near hazardous waste sites and to be exposed to lead paint and other poisons. The epidemic of asthma in urban communities is just one manifestation of such toxic environments. As president, John Kerry will create Environmental Empowerment Zones to clean up communities and reduce exposure to life-threatening pollutants and toxins.
- ? **Increase Research Funding.** Effective strategies for reducing the growing burden of chronic and largely preventable diseases are desperately needed. As president, John Kerry will invest the necessary resources for research on the causes, prevention and treatment options for chronic diseases. John Kerry will ensure adequate research funding for health conditions that disproportionately affect minorities, and that minorities are adequately represented in clinical trials as investigators and as participants.