

Understanding WEAC's health care principles

Every day, teachers, ESP and other school staff see firsthand the affects the health care crisis has had in Wisconsin. Children in families without insurance are far more likely to miss school or have difficulties fully participating in school. These children are put at a disadvantage for the rest of their lives.

Working families are feeling the pinch the most. A study last year on health care found that Wisconsin's health insurance costs were 23 percent above the national average, equaling \$1,868 more per employee. Another study showed that eight of the 10 most expensive cities in the country for physician costs are right here in Wisconsin.

In our state, 11 percent of residents were reported to be without health insurance, even as nearly 83 percent of them lived in a household in which a family member was employed. That number is sure to grow as layoffs continue across Wisconsin. This could mean life or death for those who are uninsured or underinsured.

Health care coverage is too important to leave to chance, and our state is at the forefront of the problem. Wisconsin's health insurance rates have increased 30 percent faster than the national average. While national employer-based health insurance premiums have increased by 119 percent this decade, they have increased 149 percent in Wisconsin.

The problem has grown too great to ignore the need for change. Health care reform is coming, whether it be on a state or federal level. To guide us through the process of health care reform, the WEAC Board has adopted several principles related to health care. The core principle is: Our union believes all Wisconsin residents should have guaranteed access to affordable health care that protects choice of providers and the quality of services – providing security for Wisconsin's families.

Other principles adopted by the WEAC Board include:

- 1) Every Wisconsin resident should have access to preventive, diagnostic, routine and catastrophic care.
- 2) Health care coverage in Wisconsin must not be denied based on age, health status, occupation or pre-existing conditions.
- 3) Strategies must be implemented that reduce and contain costs to assure affordable coverage for all individuals and employers.
- 4) Individuals, employers and government must be required to pay their fair share.
- 5) Full, free and fair collective bargaining rights must be established which will allow unions to negotiate over both supplemental coverage beyond that provided by the universal plan, as well as a share of the savings from health care reforms.

These principles will guide WEAC and its members through any kind of state or federal single-payer health care plan.

To get involved in the informational campaign regarding health care, e-mail healthcare@weac.org for e-alerts and share your story by sending it to shareyourstory@weac.org.

For more information about health care reform, visit www.weac.org/healthcare.