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Health Reform Column:
Health reform in Kansas – It's in our hands

The following is a column by Marci Nielsen, PhD, MPH, Executive Director of the Kansas Health Policy Authority, regarding the need to pass comprehensive health reform legislation in Kansas.

After many months of listening to Kansans' concerns and suggestions about our health system, the Health Policy Authority delivered 21 health reform recommendations to the Kansas legislature last week. These recommendations represent the dedicated work of the Kansas Health Policy Authority (KHPA) Board, four Advisory Councils made up of health care providers, purchasers and consumers, a Health for All Kansas Steering Committee, and comments from over a thousand Kansans, all of whom weighed in with their health reform suggestions. But the health reform debate is just beginning.

A recent report suggests that health reform is needed in Kansas. According to the report, "America's Health Rankings," Kansans' health has worsened. In 2006, Kansas was nationally ranked 17th for overall health; in 2007, Kansas dropped to number 23. Over the past year, smoking increased by 12%, obesity increased by 8%, the uninsured increased by 19%, and preventable hospitalizations increased by 6%.

The good news is that Kansas can do better -- the proposal delivered by the KHPA takes a broad approach to health reform by focusing not just on improving access to health care, but also on improving health behaviors and ultimately health status. Its three goals, **Promoting personal responsibility, Paying for prevention and promoting medical homes, and Providing and protecting affordable health insurance** are designed to improve health outcomes, help control rising health care costs, and provide an additional 86,000 Kansans with insurance.

We are presented with the opportunity to make immediate and significant changes to benefit the overall health and health care of all Kansans. Let's not allow this opportunity to slip through our hands. We encourage all Kansans to engage in the debate: contact your legislators, talk with your neighbors and friends, write to the news media. Let them know what you do or do not support -- and how the health system in Kansas can better serve its residents.

The evidence indicates that Kansas needs and wants health reform. For that to happen, action on all of our part is required. We are grateful for the input from Kansans statewide and we encourage you to read the KHPA Board health reform recommendations and join the conversation: www.khpa.ks.gov.

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The Health Policy Authority is a state agency created to develop and maintain a coordinated and data-driven health policy agenda, and it was tasked this year with reforming health care delivery in Kansas. On November 1, 2007, the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board reported to the Governor and Kansas Legislature health reform options aimed at improving the health and health care system in Kansas.

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