



Where we stand ...

HEALTHCARE REFORM

The time to reform our healthcare system is now. Many Americans are uninsured or struggle to pay the soaring costs of healthcare. Reform is key to regaining economic strength, especially in these difficult times. Rising healthcare costs strain family budgets, burden businesses of all sizes, squeeze state and federal budgets, and are delaying America's economic recovery. Reform can enhance choice and competition in care, while also helping to create jobs, spur innovation, and make an important and timely investment in America.

The AFT strongly supports healthcare reform that will guarantee high-quality, affordable healthcare for all. Successful reform will:

Establish an effective and comprehensive public plan option that will guarantee high-quality, affordable coverage. Americans need the assurance and security of coverage that a public health insurance plan option can offer. A public plan option will make private health insurance companies compete for business, bring down costs and guarantee that quality, affordable coverage will be there for everyone. Under this option, Americans will be able to keep their current private plans if they so choose.

Ensure that employer-provided healthcare benefits are not taxed. Nearly 160 million Americans get their health benefits through their employers. Working Americans will face a real hardship if these benefits are taxed. Workers already are struggling to pay for their healthcare costs. Taxing their plans will make healthcare unaffordable for many working families.

In negotiating health benefits, workers frequently forgo needed pay increases in exchange for affordable healthcare coverage. Taxing these benefits will unfairly penalize workers who have employer-provided coverage. And it will be an even greater burden for many older workers whose coverage is more expensive.

Require high-quality staffing standards. More than 100,000 hospital patients die each year as a result of preventable mistakes. Research shows that having the right number of nurses at the bedside would prevent 86 percent of medical mistakes. Appropriate staffing levels help reduce patient readmissions and expensive complications such as pneumonia, pressure ulcers and urinary tract infections. Adequate staffing not only saves lives but also saves money. We can cut costs and improve quality. To do this, we must engage frontline healthcare workers in the process, and ensure that the ratio of nurses to patients is optimal.