

Report on Healthy Washington Coalition Health Care Caucuses

Following the completion of the 2008 Washington Legislative Session, the Healthy Washington Coalition decided to hold a series of seven Health Care Caucuses across our state. This decision was made after the Legislature and the Governor decided to amend the language of SB 6333 to delay the appointment of a Citizens' Working Group until some time in 2009. The intention of the Healthy Washington Coalition in supporting the appointment of a Working Group in 2008 was to stimulate robust civic engagement about the need for health care reform and also to explain across the state the study that was created in SB 6333. When the Legislature decided to delay the appointment of the Working Group, the Healthy Washington Coalition decided to initiate the civic engagement and education process through the Healthy Washington Coalition Health Care Caucuses.

Beginning on June 19, 2008, seven, soon to become eight, Health Care Caucuses were initiated across the state. 1181 Washington residents registered at the Caucuses and it is estimated that an additional 100 residents attended but failed to sign the registration form. The Caucuses were held in Seattle, Tacoma, Yakima, Spokane, Bellevue, Everett, Vancouver and Wenatchee.

The programs consisted of a presentation of the common problems we face as communities in our health care delivery and financing system. In each Caucus, this part of the program was presented by a local resident who either delivered health care services, worked in an institution that delivered health care services, or was a large purchaser of health care services. We then explained the work of the Healthy Washington Coalition and the process that had been put in place with passage of SB 6333 and briefly explained the five reform proposals being analyzed through SB 6333.

We then invited participants to discuss and debate twelve health care related values which had been developed through a lengthy process by members of the Healthy Washington Coalition. At the end of what proved to be, in every Caucus, a robust discussion and debate, attendees voted for their four top priority values. The four top values for a reformed health care system proved to be:

- Cover everyone
- Assure the cost of health care, including prescriptions, is affordable.

- Provide public health prevention services for all
- Assure access to care when people need it and in a way that meets their needs

Finally, attendees were urged to take action by circulating a Petition that was provided to them and also asking candidates and elected officials specific questions about health care reform during the election season.

Attendees to the caucus were from diverse sectors of the communities. They reflected both the broad diversity that is manifested in the membership of the Healthy Washington Coalition and in the broader communities which hosted the Caucuses. The Caucuses exceeded the expectations of the Coalition both in the level of participation, the diversity of those who attended, and the seriousness with which the discussion and debate were treated.

The Healthy Washington Coalition made a commitment to keep contact with the attendees and also the people who sign the petitions and provide their email addresses. The Coalition is in the process of creating a significant data base as a result of the Caucuses through which we will keep participants informed regarding the health care discussions and decisions during the 2009 legislative and Congressional sessions.