

**Resolution of the Board of Directors in Support of the “A Region in Crisis: A Call to Reduce the Uninsured and Expand Access to Health Care in the Ten-County Houston Region” White Paper**

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The Houston region is in the midst of a health care crisis, one which affects the health of most Houstonians and their neighbors and threatens the economic viability and quality of life currently enjoyed by its residents. The crisis consists of two inter-connected issues related to access to and the cost of health care that must be addressed simultaneously:

- 1) the highest rates of health care uninsured in the country; and
- 2) an over-burdened, fragmented safety net provider system for the uninsured/medically indigent.

This is a regional problem that can only be solved through collaborative initiatives undertaken by all stakeholders – government, health care providers, businesses, faith-based organizations and others. Unless the community begins to address the issues that are at the root of the problem, the health care crisis in the Houston region will continue to escalate.

The Greater Houston Partnership recommends the establishment of a regional oversight board comprised of business leaders, government leaders, community leaders, media and health care providers that would be responsible for the development of a strategic plan to address the lack of access to health services for the uninsured and to reduce the number of uninsured in the region.

In addition to the creation of a regional oversight board, the following are proposed solutions that the regional oversight board could recommend to resolve the uninsured and underinsured problems facing our region:

1) The Houston Region

- A) Create additional primary care, specialty care, mental health and dental care capacity and assist in its funding through tax dollars, corporate involvement and charitable contributions.
- B) Become educated about the critical importance of finding and establishing a relationship with a primary care physician or a clinic.
- C) Encourage state and local governments to release the trauma funds currently designated for Level I trauma centers, as well as increase trauma capacity and funding.

- D) Explore innovative insurance models for small employers and self-employed individuals that will provide access to care in an affordable manner.
- E) Require all contractors to provide health insurance to their employees as a requirement of contracting.
- F) Support the Health Information Exchange initiative and encourage the provider community in the Houston region to participate.

2) Harris County Hospital District

- A) Staff and operate all of its inpatient beds and outpatient services to help alleviate the shortage of health care resources for the uninsured.
- B) Continue to expand its hospital, primary care and specialty care capacity.
- C) Utilize a portion of its cash reserves that has been built based on issued bond ratings and incremental tax revenues on increasing the number of primary care, specialty care, and mental health clinics in the county or compensate existing providers for treating eligible Harris County indigents.
- D) Continue to open more outpatient health centers focused on primary and secondary care and strategically located in communities with the greatest need.
- E) Continue to look for opportunities to purchase or lease hospital beds and diagnostic capabilities from other Houston area hospitals with excess capacity.
- F) Strengthen its connections to non-county clinics through health information technology and other mechanisms to improve flow of patients for specialty care not available in other clinics.

3) Houston Region Hospitals

- A) Demand their institutions treat their proportionate share of the uninsured and Medicaid patients by directly providing emergency care, inpatient care and outpatient services to these patients.
- B) Assist in the creation and funding of the needed primary care, specialty care and mental health clinics in the region.
- C) Implement policies similar to the Harris County Hospital District's RightCare policy to re-direct care away from emergency rooms when appropriate.

4) Harris County Commissioners Court

- A) Ensure taxpayers are receiving maximum benefit for the services provided by the Harris County Hospital District.
- B) Review the hospital district tax rate to determine whether the rate is at a level comparable to other large metropolitan areas in the state that operate a hospital district to provide adequate care.
- C) Ask legislators or the Regional Health Policy Services Council of the Houston-Galveston Area Council to convene commissioners from neighboring counties to develop long-term solutions to the health care problems facing the region.

5) Texas State Legislature

- A) Release the reserved trauma funds in order to open additional Level I trauma centers in Southeast Texas or expand existing ones.
- B) Expand eligibility criteria for Medicaid and SCHIP to cover more Texans and maximize the federal match.
- C) Enact new health insurance regulations that would reform small group premium-setting and underwriting rules, and encourage development of large-risk pools for small employers and the self-employed. Promote and expand other programs that provide low-cost, high-quality health insurance to these groups.
- D) Continue to fund additional nursing school faculty positions so all qualified nursing school applicants can be accepted into Texas nursing schools to help alleviate the extreme shortage of nurses.

6) University Systems Board of Regents

- A) Continue to promote the use of medical homes to better coordinate comprehensive patient care.
- B) Encourage health-related organizations to continue collaborating together to provide health care services to uninsured communities.
- C) Encourage additional residency spots to address the severe shortage of primary care physicians in the Houston region.
- D) Continue to advocate for increased funding and higher salaries for faculty including nursing staff.

7) Health Care Clinics

- A) Build more federally qualified health clinic access points and other clinic models to serve the uninsured in the Houston region.

8) Harris County Medical Society

- A) Continue to advocate for increased primary care physician positions in residency programs and increased funding for these positions.
- B) Continue to encourage their physician members to contribute time to community clinics and/or the Provider Health Network operated by Gateway to Care and to collaborate with Gateway to Care to determine the level of need to better communicate with their members.
- C) Encourage their members to open more practices to Medicaid patients where appropriate geographically and by specialty.
- D) Increase its engagement and involvement with the issue of the uninsured in the Houston region and help educate the community on the proper use of primary care by supporting state and nation-wide efforts to identify best practices and evidence-based medicine to improve efficiency and reduce the cost of care.

9) Health Insurance Companies

- A) Increase compensation for primary and preventive services and to provide incentives for the development of medical homes.
- B) Develop strategic new compensation models to distribute savings to hospitals for decreasing unnecessary emergency and in-patient services.
- C) Create individual and small-group insurance products, including products designed for the low-income population.

10) Greater Houston Partnership

- A) Continue to advocate for health care policies that promote better utilization of financial resources by maximizing federal and state funds.
- B) Continue to support legislative initiatives that facilitate the recruitment of health care providers in health professional shortage areas.

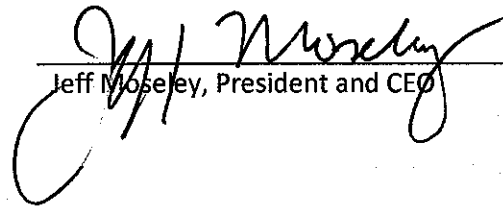
- C) Continue to encourage the creation of additional federally-qualified health centers.
- D) Continue to support legislation that creates a CHIP buy-in program.
- E) Advocate for an appropriate level of taxes to support necessary and needed services for the HCHD and/or the newly established multi-county regional health care system.

Greater Houston Partnership's intent is to clarify and educate the public about the specific issues driving the health care crisis in the Houston region; to highlight what is currently being done to address these issues (and why these efforts are insufficient); to propose comprehensive and manageable solutions; and to outline the steps that can be taken to ensure this problem receives the appropriate resources necessary to solve it. It is intended that this white paper will become the critical first step on the long journey towards the twin goals of reducing the uninsured and establishing a sustainable, equitable and compassionate health care system in the Houston region.



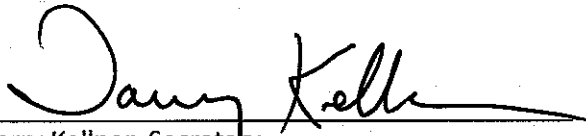
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Patrick Oxford, Chairman



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Jeff Moseley, President and CEO



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Larry Kellner, Secretary

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 3, 2010

**TO:** Greater Houston Partnership Board of Directors

**FROM:** Daniel J. Wolterman, 2009 Chairman  
Health Care Policy Advisory Committee

**SUBJECT:** Resolution of the Board of Directors in Support of the "A Region in Crisis: A Call to Reduce the Uninsured and Expand Access to Health Care in the Ten-County Houston Region" White Paper.

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### RECOMMENDATION

The Houston region is in the midst of a health care crisis, one which affects the health of most Houstonians and their neighbors and threatens the economic viability and quality of life currently enjoyed by its residents. The crisis consists of two inter-connected issues related to access to and the cost of health care that must be addressed simultaneously:

- 3) the highest rates of health care uninsured in the country; and
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This is a regional problem that can only be solved through collaborative initiatives undertaken by all stakeholders – government, health care providers, businesses, faith-based organizations and others. Unless the community begins to address the issues that are at the root of the problem, the health care crisis in the Houston region will continue to escalate.

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**BACKGROUND**

Please see the attached white paper.

**LEGISLATION NEEDED**

Please see the attached white paper.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact to the Greater Houston Partnership.

**KNOWN OPPOSITION**

No known opposition at this time.

**RESOURCES REQUIRED**

There are no additional resources that will be required by the Greater Houston Partnership.