

2019 Healthcare That Works for All

This paper is one of a series describing what a decade of successful change in healthcare could look like in 2019. Each paper focuses on one aspect of healthcare. To see the other papers for a comprehensive view of systems change, go to [http://www.altfutures.com/2019 Healthcare That Works For All](http://www.altfutures.com/2019_Healthcare_That_Works_For_All).

Values for Healthcare

Values for A Healthcare Delivery System That Works for All

The healthcare system should:

1. Provide Access to Affordable, Comprehensive, High Quality Health Coverage for All
2. Provide Choice of Coverage Options, Providers, and Treatments
3. Be Safe For All Patients
4. Deliver Effective, Evidence-based Care
5. Provide Patient-Centered Care
6. Deliver Timely Care
7. Provide Efficient, Cost Effective Care
8. Be Equitable For All
9. Make Health and Healthcare a Shared Responsibility of the Individual, Providers and Society

Why Our Healthcare Values Need To Be Addressed

Our healthcare system should be defined by our values and our values should be evident in our healthcare. Values are significant statements of the qualities we want to shape our behavior. Our values should therefore define the type of healthcare system we seek, its operation and outcomes. Values are what guide critical choices. We have not to date consciously identified what our healthcare values are in America. As a result there is much about our healthcare that is raising disturbing conflicts with deeply held American values. The conflict between our values and our healthcare leads to a political struggle over trade-offs, which signals that our country's values need to be publicly addressed.

Historically, our nation has periodically overturned practices and institutions that conflict with deeply held values. When slavery conflicted with our most fundamental value statement for democracy that "all men are created equal" the institution of slavery was overturned after great struggle. The commitment to equity or fairness expanded further with women's rights. Now in healthcare we are slowly changing our minds and hearts about whether or not we should accept the growing disparities in the health status of the poor and the rich. We can become more compassionate recognizing that the long-held value of individual independence needs to be joined with the collective value of interdependence, already elevated over recent decades by the environmental movement. With that

recognition we will need to define where the individual's freedom to choose turns into responsibility to make choices that improve health not only for the individual, but also the family, community and country. America's history is the story of periodic challenges to many longstanding practices and institutions that constrain the reach of deeply held values. This challenge now faces the country: to extend access to healthcare so that we are more compassionate, fair and equitable.

Before considering values statements that can be proposed for the U.S. in 2019, we note the values that shape healthcare in other developed countries. Around the world developed countries consciously state values that guide how healthcare systems develop and deploy resources. These are:

- Universality – everyone in society has healthcare coverage
- Equity – everyone has access to comparable services and quality
- Public Responsibility – the public accepts the government's role in assuring healthcare is available
- Government regulation – people are skeptical that the unregulated marketplace will adequately look after society's best interests
- Accepting spending limits -- individuals accept constraint on society's obligation to pay for all available healthcare services so healthcare operates within a publicly determined global budget
- Evidence-based medicine and technology assessment – efficacy is documented before services are accepted for public payment

In the 1990s WHO revised its "Health For All" vision. Every nation has ratified the vision, which includes an explicit set of values: Equity, Solidarity, Sustainability, Ethics, Gender and Human Rights. The U.S. made a parallel statement that equity is an important value when we set the Healthy People 2010 Objectives for the Nation. One of the two overarching goals for this decade is the elimination of health disparities. So equity in health is rising into public consciousness as a value and a focus.

Yet in terms of values for healthcare, our current system has evolved without broad agreement over the values that should determine the structures and policies defining the system. Instead of values we have operating assumptions that are very different from other developed nations:

- The individual is responsible for obtaining healthcare coverage, except those who are poor or over 65;
- Employers should, but are not required to, provide health insurance;
- For those who are not insured, poor or over 65, they can make do or go to the emergency room of hospitals for their care;
- Free markets will ensure innovation, high quality and availability;
- Governments cannot effectively manage the complexity of healthcare;
- Technology & therapeutics are more desirable than healthy living and treatment is worth more than prevention.

Forecast for a Change in Values

There is mounting opposition to our current healthcare system that stems at least in part from a deeply rooted conflict in values, which has stalled previous attempts to reform healthcare. This ideological clash will resolve in the coming years so that pragmatic changes can be made in the name of an explicit set of values that include fairness, freedom to choose and responsibility for all in healthcare. Rather than “government run versus free market” there will be a uniquely American solution that incorporates the interdependence of collective interests and individual freedoms. These changes will be guided by explicit discussion of our values. The change process will engage an informed public in determining what values will be foremost in healthcare.

The public will grow less trusting that the free market can work effectively for healthcare, and therefore be more open to a greater government role. Yet people will still recognize that “government-run” healthcare has unacceptable problems. In political debates strong voices will call for the government to ensure access to care for all, improve quality and efficiency and coordinate the disparate parts of the U.S. healthcare system. Yet we will still want the vitality and innovation that offers Americans such a diversity of choices. Government leaders will have to reconcile these differences in an open political process leading to new healthcare policies.

A number of organizations are leading on a path to better healthcare that begins with the dialogue on values. On this path we place the Belmont Vision, America Speaks, the National Issues Forum Institute, the Center for Health Transformation, the New America Foundation’s “Next Social Contract” and others. This path should move toward a larger public dialogue structured by the core aims for change in healthcare identified by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report on “Crossing the Quality Chasm.” Healthcare should be:

1. Safe
2. Effective
3. Patient-Centered
4. Timely
5. Efficient
6. Equitable

Sustainability of healthcare depends upon both the fundamental public agreement that change is needed and that core values should guide change. Healthcare is now on the road to bankrupting the U.S. financially and perhaps even morally. Yet sustainable change can be based on accepted limits that are publically agreed forms of rationing in the context of universal access to a basic set of healthcare offerings. To place constraints on healthcare we must also recognize the value of transparency in a democratic process. For example, when evaluating the comparative effectiveness of therapies and providers, the basis for making judgments should be clear to all, without endangering the privacy of individuals who submit personal data to the evaluation process.

Pragmatic Steps

The IOM aims can support a healthcare system that works for all. These aims require important changes in all aspects of the healthcare system guided by values that Americans agree on through the coming political debates. Our work on this “2019 Healthcare That Works For All” Project assumes that the basic belief in fairness will make equality a driving value for change by expanding access. Yet there are a number of steps that are needed now to help determine the values that drive the political process for change.

- A. Hold public dialogues to develop a social contract that defines the values, rights and responsibilities that healthcare must support;
- B. Reach out to stakeholders in the current system to build support for the emerging values and the related fundamental changes that will be needed to meet the values.
- C. Design processes to infuse these values into all aspects of healthcare.

Failure to Change

The U.S. is entering into a period where fundamental change in our healthcare system is possible. Fundamental change is needed to make our healthcare system sustainable both fiscally and morally. Our current path is leading to increasing and unsustainable costs while at the same time contributing to the growth of health inequities. A dialogue of what we as a nation truly value in healthcare is needed to begin this reform. The danger of not articulating these values broadly is that healthcare reform will fail due to lack support, and the system will bankrupt the nation. Generational tensions will rise over the inherent unfairness of poor, young workers paying high taxes to support healthcare for a growing group of relatively wealthy elderly. America will grow weaker economically and politically. People worldwide will lose respect for the moral standing of America, and at home people will lose faith in the country’s historic commitment to a value proposition long held to be self evident.