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NATIONAL EDITION



## New Plans for Solving the Health Care Crisis

BY RICHARD J. MONELLO



Perhaps there is hope for fixing the health care crisis after all. Hillary Rodham Clinton, author of a failed attempt to

overhaul health care in the 90s, and Newt Gingrich, engineer of the 90s Republican revolution largely brought on by Clinton's failed attempt, sat down together at a recent National Press Club session titled "Ceasefire on Health Care" to discuss what they might agree on.

And they did agree indeed on several issues including, much to the surprise of some, Gingrich's proposal to "voucherize" Medicaid. "There is enough money in the system right now to cover the uninsured," said Clinton. While the meeting was not earth-shattering, perhaps it is a sign of a growing trend toward piecemeal fixes to the health care crisis rather than starting from scratch.

### The uncovered masses

That we are and have been in a health care crisis is clear. A recent report by the Census Bureau revealed that there has been a spike in the number of Americans without health care coverage. In fact, 45.8 million Americans have no insurance of any type. The reason for the most part is that they simply cannot afford any kind of coverage. Attempts to provide universal coverage or cause significant changes through federal mandates have failed.

These disturbing figures from the Census Bureau should serve as a call to action for government policymakers as well as health care companies. We need to work together and formulate a plan that will help all Americans gain access to affordable health care. Fortunately, solutions are on the horizon.

According to the Bush administration, the solution would be moving health care toward new association-based health plans, that include access to HSAs (health

savings accounts) and other consumer driven health plans. "To make insurance more affordable, Congress must act to address rapidly rising health care costs," stated President Bush. "Small businesses should be able to band together and negotiate for lower insurance rates so they can cover more workers with health insurance. I urge you to pass association health plans."

The use of association-based health plans is finally starting to catch on. With association health plans (AHPs), medical coverage is purchased through trade guilds, unions, or membership associations on behalf of their members. These plans offer insurance solutions for those who previously thought they were "uninsurable." Realtors, construction workers, and retirees, for example, are pooling their negotiating power under the umbrella of an association to obtain affordable coverage. Today, an increasing number of people are taking a look at these

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alternative plans.

AHPs include myriad choices and benefits for its members. Membership in certain plans enables members to access hospital indemnity benefits, prescription benefits, and disability benefits. They often carry provisions for medical, dental, accident, and vision care. They may even include lifestyle benefits such as roadside service, travel benefits, and discounts on shopping, dining, and movies.

### **Blanket protection**

In addition to being a good alternative for consumers, these new health plans are beneficial for agents, especially those agents looking to strengthen their portfolio and provide health care coverage to the uninsurable.

As an agent marketing to employers and individuals, these association health plans may provide the missing link in your

portfolio because they specifically address your declines and uninsurables. Often, people with pre-existing conditions worry about being accepted into new plans. The good news is that many of these association health plans accept everyone — even those with pre-existing conditions.

Agents can catch the wave by joining local organizations and networking with industry groups. Do you have several clients who work in the same industry, such as realtors, electricians, house painters, or self-employed contractors? If so, you can market yourself as a specialist in that industry and offer to provide a creative solution to an age-old insurance dilemma.

*Richard J. Monello is a principal and founder of Custom Health Plans, Inc. Custom Health Plans, Inc. is a leader in providing association health plans. For more information on association-based health plans, please see [www.wecoveramerica.com](http://www.wecoveramerica.com) or call 888-458-8660.*