

HEALTHCARE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
By The West Sound for Social Justice
Healthcare Action Team

Healthcare in the United States of America is a complex and overly complicated mash up of government programs like Medicare and Medicaid, nonprofit providers, market based for profit insurers, providers, and pharmaceutical corporations. Under this arrangement, we as a nation spend more money on healthcare per capita than any other nation and yet have poorer health outcomes, including shorter life expectancy, greater infant mortality, and greater prevalence of chronic conditions.

The Affordable Care Act, signed into law 23 March, 2010, was designed to increase health insurance quality and affordability, lower the uninsured rate by expanding insurance coverage, and reduce the costs of healthcare. It introduced mechanisms including mandates, subsidies, and insurance exchanges. The law requires insurers to accept all applicants, cover a specific list of conditions, and charge the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or sex. Essential benefits of the ACA include ambulatory care, prescription drugs, emergency care, mental health services, hospitalization and habilitative services, preventive and wellness services, laboratory services, pediatric care, and maternity and newborn care. As a result of the ACA, 24 million Americans have healthcare. The essential flaw in the ACA is the non-value added waste (some estimate 30%) created via administrative costs and the bureaucracies that interact between public and private insurer organizations.

While the ACA was a step in right direction, politically it became a nightmare for Democrats as the Republicans gained the majority in both the House and the Senate based largely on their promises to repeal and replace. The election of Donald Trump as the 45th president completed the trifecta of control over legislative power. The House of Representatives controls the purse strings and has taken steps to defund the ACA via a budget reconciliation directive that forces the House to reduce the deficit.

In early May of 2017, the House passed legislation entitled American Health Care Act (AHCA). According to the independent Congressional Business Office “score” AHCA will eliminate the healthcare of 23 million Americans; it eliminates funding for Planned Parenthood, it raises premiums for older Americans by as much as 850%; it cuts Medicaid by \$880 billion, and it provides the wealthiest Americans nearly a trillion dollar tax cut over the next decade. Amendments to the bill allow States to waive out of essential benefits like ambulance trips and emergency room visits, labs tests, and pregnancy care. It also allows insurers to charge older people and people with preexisting conditions more. The Senate is now focusing on their version of healthcare legislation. What Republicans fail to understand is that healthcare is a right for all citizens; it is not a privilege just for those that can afford it. Public outrage over the AHCA is strongly coupled with the continuing rise of healthcare costs, and threats to Medicare and Medicaid affecting women’s health (Planned Parenthood), the elderly, people with mental health issues, and those with addictions.

The 2018 elections offer the best chance to reverse who controls both the House and Senate, paving the way for the U.S. to ultimately adopt a universal, single payer healthcare system. The Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act, H.R. 676, based on Physicians for a National Health Program, American Journal for Public Health-published Physicians' Proposal, would establish an American single-payer health insurance system. Under a single-payer system, most medical care would be paid for by the Government of the United States, ending the need for private health insurance and premiums, and likely recasting private insurance companies as providing purely supplemental coverage, to be used when non-essential care is sought.

We invite the members of WSSJ to become better informed on Healthcare through our work and findings. The body of that work is fifteen pages long and is fully referenced, it is the reason for this Executive Summary. We also suggest that when you engage in public forums and discussions that you should be armed with facts. We intend on continuing to take direct action to let our Members of Congress know how we feel about healthcare and to alert you to trends and changes that we see. We hope you agree with the following and will take individual action for the common good.

The critical path forward for making the Universal, Single Payer Healthcare system a reality includes the following strategies:

1. Defeat current GOP repeal and replace legislation.
2. Support local, regional, and national Universal, Single Payer Health Care public engagement dialog.
3. Support all efforts to flip local, State, and National House and Senate in the 2018 election cycle by endorsing progressive candidates that support Universal, Single Payer Health Care.
4. Overturn Citizens United; get dark money out of politics.
5. Defeat GOP in the 2020 presidential elections with a Social Democratic candidate (i.e., Bernie Sanders).