



Washington Community Action Network
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Washington CAN! 2012 Legislative Priorities

Washington State continues to face a budget deficit for the 2011-2013 biennium. The proposed cuts to health care, education, and social services would be devastating to working families, communities of color, and the most vulnerable in our state and would result in tens of thousands of jobs lost. We believe that the large corporations who are directly responsible for our economic meltdown need to share in the sacrifice of fixing our economy. In Washington State corporations receive billions in tax exemptions and subsidies, while families and communities are left to fend for themselves. It's time to close corporate tax loopholes and put that money back into our communities.

We urge lawmakers to:

Raise Revenues while protecting existing health care programs

Reduce the budget deficit through a balanced approach, instead of an all-cuts approach. Our state loses billions of dollars each year on special tax exemptions, credits, and preferential rates. This money could be used for essential services that keep Washington families healthy. It's time for lawmakers to level the playing field and balance the costs and benefits of tax expenditures against other public priorities.

Under proposed budget reductions health care programs that are the last safety net of low income people and communities of color are threatened. These cuts will affect tens of thousands of low-income people; pushing more of our communities into the already saturated emergency rooms. The legislature needs to think through the impact that budget decisions will have on low-income people and people of color in Washington State before making cuts to vital programs. We must keep all health care programs strong - the health of our communities depends on it.

Fully Implement the Affordable Care Act:

- ***Strengthen Washington Health Benefits Exchange.***
In 2011, the Washington State Legislature took the first steps towards the implementation of Health Care Reform by creating the foundation of the Health Benefits Exchange. Our lawmakers must pass legislation that ensures that the Exchange will provide quality, affordable health care for every person living in our State, particularly low-income residents. The interest of the people needs to be the top priority and legislators should strive for a system that will ensure transparency and accountability. This can be done by including specific mechanisms to protect consumers from insurance industry abuses and eliminating racial disparities in health. Legislation needs to be enacted that prevents association plans from doing medical underwriting in the small group market. The Exchange should also expand the small group health insurance pool to include small businesses with up to 100 employees in that market. Lawmakers must repeal the provision that exempts association health plans from doing community rating in insurance health while doing business in the state of Washington.
- ***Expand Basic Health & Implement the Federal Basic Health Option***
Washington State already has 20 years of experience running a Basic Health Plan and there are currently over 150,000 people on its waiting list. This plan must be expanded to provide coverage to the more than one million Washingtonians now uninsured. The Affordable Care Act gives Washington State the opportunity to implement the Federal Basic Health Option. This program will give affordable health coverage for the uninsured working poor.

Increase access to dental care for consumers

Access to a dentist is essential for good health. Right now, 30 out of 39 counties in Washington face a shortage of dental care professionals. Creating a new mid-level dental provider – a dental therapist – is an effective way to create much needed jobs and meet the growing demands and needs of communities across our state, particularly low-income communities of color and native communities. With people losing their jobs and their health insurance and with state dental health programs at risk of complete elimination, finding cost-effective solutions that promote access to quality affordable dental care is more important than ever. The state legislature should support the dental therapist model in order to ensure timely, quality, affordable access to dental care for all Washingtonians.