

As a medical student, I am writing you to address health disparities and inequalities in healthcare. Between 2003 and 2006, health disparities and early death cost 1.24 trillion dollars. The Student National Medical Association is the nation's oldest and largest independent, student-run organization focused on the needs and concerns of underserved communities. I am sure you are aware that it is a well established and well researched fact that minorities are both less likely to receive health care and to suffer greater mortality as a result of disease. We feel that one important step in the effort to eliminate health disparities for minority populations is to increase their access to health care.

As Congress is determined to fix the healthcare system through health reform, it is important to include solutions that address health disparities and inequalities as a part of the health reform bill. It is essential that the health reform bill addresses:

- Establishment of national standards for cultural competency and language sensitivity for health related services.
- Increase resources to encourage healthy behavior in cities with large health disparities through the creation of incentives for businesses which provide services like gymnasiums and grocery stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Creating policy that includes funding directed toward increasing the proportion of underrepresented minority students entering health care.
- Creating policy that requires hospitals and clinics to include measures of racial and ethnic disparities in quality performance measurements.
- Formally establishing a permanent National Health Workforce Commission dedicated to reviewing federal policies with respect to the training, financing, and distribution of the health professional workforce, particularly with respect to such workforce in rural, frontier, and urban underserved areas.
- Increasing the funding and support for organizations and individuals committed to working with minority populations as well as lay health advisors/community peers who educate the public about good health behaviors.

Through your continued support of this legislation, together we hope to work to ensure equal access to quality health care to all populations without regard for race, creed, religion, or any other protected entity.