



Press Release

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Health Care Reform Must Meet Human Rights Standards: 10 Principles for Financing Health Care

(New York) – In response to President Obama’s eight principles for health care reform, the Human Right to Health Program, run by the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and the National Health Law Program, has released ten human rights principles for financing health care. The ten principles set down markers for health care reformers to help them meet human rights standards. Taken together they provide a framework for realizing the goal of a healthy society in a financially sustainable way.

“Key to the financial sustainability of our health care system is that we treat health care as a public good,” says Dr. Anja Rudiger, director of the Human Right to Health Program. “Because public goods belong to all of us, we cannot allow for-profit companies such as insurers to restrict our access to care. According to human rights principles, health care should be publicly financed and administered rather than sold through insurance middlemen to those who can afford it.”

Human rights principles also require health care to be financed in a way that is accountable to the people and responsive to health needs, and that rewards quality, appropriate care and improved health outcomes. The principles stress that resources in the health care system must be used for the public purpose of protecting everyone’s health, leaving no one behind, and investing in communities whose health has not kept up with the rest of the population.

“We’re encouraged that President Obama recently confirmed that for-profit private companies are not the best choice for realizing a public purpose,” said Dr. Rudiger, referring to the president’s remarks on earmarks. “The president said that ‘Private companies differ from the public entities that Americans rely on every day — schools, and police stations, and fire departments [where] there’s some confidence that there’s going to be a public purpose.’ For-profit corporations in the health care industry simply aren’t set up to fulfill such a public purpose; they exist to make a private profit,” Dr. Rudiger points out.¹

According to human rights standards, first articulated under U.S. leadership in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the human right to health care requires a system of health protection which ensures that everyone can get appropriate health care, where and when they need it, regardless of their ability to pay.

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“Human Rights Principles for Financing Health Care” is available for download at www.nesri.org.

¹ “Transcript: Obama Remarks on Earmark Reform”, New York Times, March 11, 2009.