

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

A GANNETT COMPANY

ONLINE AT RGJ.COM

One View: Candidates must address health policy questions

by Tom McCoy



Think about the people who live on your street or apartment building, the people you see every day. According to the averages, the majority of them – 54 percent of Nevadans

according to federal stats – have at least one serious chronic disease like cancer, diabetes, stroke or heart disease.

Sobering, isn't it?

This is not only a health concern, but also a political one. In the coming election, candidates are going to have to share their vision of what our health care system should be in the United States, and in greater detail than whether they want to keep or repeal Obamacare. At a time in our history in which hundreds of thousands of citizens in our state have serious and costly health conditions – many of them preventable – this election has to be about improving population wellness and who has the best answers to achieve a healthier Nevada and America.

This discussion hasn't happened yet. We hear a lot of rhetoric about the cost of health care and how our politicians need to find ways to make care more affordable. What we don't hear about is the fact that 86 cents of every health care dollar goes toward the treatment of these chronic diseases. Unless we do something about this

figure, it will be impossible to successfully contain health costs. And if we see more cases of cancer, diabetes and heart disease, as projected, we'll be spending significantly more money out of our pockets on health care.

This election has to be about improving population wellness and who has the best answers to achieve a healthier Nevada and America.

So, what health policy questions should candidates for Congress and the White House be answering? Here are a few ideas:

According to the New England Journal of Medicine, today in Nevada, only 60 percent of us are receiving recommended preventive care. This fact should not be possible since the purpose of the Affordable Care Act is to give every American access to quality care. What policies can we put in place to give us greater access to the preventive care that is essential to better health?

The design of our health care system is to treat illnesses well after symptoms have manifested and worsened. That's why our system's resources are focused heavily on emergency room and acute care. How do we further transform the health care system to better emphasize preventive care, early diagnosis and effective treatment in the early stages of disease to better manage health conditions?

If we want to control health care costs through improved population well-being, it is critical that we continue to develop new and better therapies for illnesses like cancer and diabetes. Further, advances in genomic research and DNA-targeted interventions are yielding the promise of future cures. If, you as a candidate, are focused on controlling costs, what then is your solution to ensure that we continue to funnel sufficient resources to the research and development of lifesaving innovations?

In eight months, America will be electing a new president, a new House of Representatives and one-third of the U.S. Senate. In this time, we need to be asking candidates how they intend to fulfill one of the most important functions of public office: how to remove the obstacles standing in the way of citizens living longer, healthier lives. Nevadans deserve these answers, especially given that the majority has one or more chronic diseases.

Tom McCoy is the Nevada government relations director for the American Cancer Society.