

Packham: Chronic disease should be focus of health care proposals

Guest column by John Packham



ance coverage.

Since 2010, reform has produced impressive gains in coverage and access to care for tens of thousands of Nevadans. These achievements, however, will be insufficient for improving health in Nevada if additional steps are not taken to address the rising burden of chronic disease.

The Partnership to Fight Chronic Diseases has recently called on all presidential candidates to elevate chronic disease as the focus of their health care proposals. The Partnership will be directing its energy toward Nevada and a handful of battleground states in order to educate voters and to call on the candidates to confront the epidemic of chronic disease.

“Costly chronic conditions like diabetes, cancer and heart disease impact every single American in some way, be it as a patient, survivor, caregiver, or loved one. It is our duty to command the attention of our elected leaders to the spectrum of issues that chronic disease presents and to advocate for policies that will bridge gaps in health care and create opportunities that promote and enable better overall health for our population,” urged Partnership Chairman Ken Thorpe.

Chronic diseases, the leading cause of death and disability in the United States,

For the past five years, health reform and related policy debates have largely focused on improving health insur-

are the number one cost driver in health care, now costing our country more than 86 percent of the \$2.9 trillion spent in health care. Moreover, the chronic disease epidemic underpins the concentration of health spending, where ten percent of the population – often people living with multiple chronic conditions – account for \$2 out of every \$3 spent on medical care.

The Partnership encourages candidates on both sides of the aisle to take a deeper look at how chronic disease prevention can help alleviate many of the financial challenges facing our health care system.

Unchecked, rising rates of chronic disease pose an unsustainable burden on state budgets and our health care system, not to mention our capacity to deal with other public health concerns and threats.

Despite these daunting challenges, there are plenty of evidence-based, upstream measures we can take to reverse the growth of chronic disease. These include better management of diabetes and

other chronic conditions, as well as safeguarding and extending access to preventive services, such as colon, breast, and cervical cancer screening.

Upstream strategies also include the adoption of community-based measures and “winnable battles” that make healthy behaviors the easy choice. In Nevada, we spend over \$1 billion annually treating tobacco-related chronic disease, which is to say, staggering downstream treatment costs that are largely preventable. Getting the last 19 percent of Nevadans who still smoke to quit, preventing kids from starting to smoke, and eliminating secondhand smoke in all workplaces would make a huge difference.

Numerous issues will compete for the attention of the presidential candidates between now and next November. The Partnership encourages candidates on both sides of the aisle to take a deeper look at how chronic disease prevention can help alleviate many of the financial challenges facing our health care system and, ultimately, lead to a healthier, more economically productive Nevada.

Additional information on the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease and its current policy platform can be found at www.fightchronicdisease.org.

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