

## Guest View: Candidates should be talking about Iowans' health care

For the many days the presidential candidates have spent traversing our state to build support for the Feb. 1 caucuses, Iowans have yet to hear a genu-



**Sherri Nielsen, Easter Seals Iowa**

ine debate about health care. To be more specific, 56 percent of the people in our state have at least one chronic disease like diabetes, cancer or stroke and we need to hear details from the candidates on how they plan to keep population health from deteriorating even further.

Chronic illness is the most important health care issue of our time. Yet it has received a distinct lack of attention on the campaign trail. For Iowa, the stakes involved in addressing this crisis could not be higher. According to the IHS Life Sciences research organization, in the next decade our state will see over 785,000 citizens with heart disease, more than 260,000 with cancer and approximately 200,000 diabetics. The human suffering and premature deaths alone make this a major concern, but the escalating incidence rate for chronic illnesses like these also has a profound impact on health care costs and productivity.

I've heard candidates from both parties give speeches about the need to make health care more affordable and I'm not satisfied with proposals focused merely on making being unwell less expensive. What we haven't heard is a discussion

surrounding the fact that 86 cents of every health care dollar goes toward treating people with chronic conditions. The most effective way to reduce health care spending - and, consequently, the cost of care - is to take steps to keep people healthier, prevent the onset of and better manage their chronic conditions to avoid costly complications.

The candidates need to tell us how they, as the next President of the United States, would use their authority and influence to change our current course.

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Research from the CDC and academic institutions tells us that the number of cases of chronic disease will spiral upward over the next several years. This future is not inevitable, but the next commander-in-chief can help us to change course.

We need to know, for example, where the candidates stand on public and private investment in innovative cures and treatments. The nation's biopharmaceutical companies are making tremendous advances in therapies for a variety of diseases, from cancer to diabetes to Al-

zheimer's. Public policy decisions can determine the level of resources being devoted to new research and development.

We need to hear from the candidates not only whether they support or oppose the Affordable Care Act, but how they would improve upon it to make sure that every Iowan has access to appropriate care. Research shows that today, despite the legal mandate that everyone have health insurance, patients are receiving recommended preventive care only 60 percent of the time. How will aspiring presidents address this disease prevention gap?

And if the next president wants to be known as the person who truly transformed American health care for the better, he or she must share a vision on how we achieve a system that emphasizes disease prevention, diagnosis and early treatment as opposed to expensive horse-already-out-of-the-barn acute care.

We are less than a month away from the presidential caucuses. Our impact as voters will never be greater than it is over the next few weeks. We should use that time to insist that the candidates, in exchange for the trust they want from us, explain in detail their ideas for preventing and managing the diseases that affect every household in Iowa.

*Sherri Nielsen, president and CEO, Easter Seals Iowa and co-chairwoman of the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease, Iowa Chapter.*