



## Health Care

We share a fundamental belief that everyone, regardless of income or social standing, should have access to affordable health care services. Healthy families create healthy communities. Healthy children learn better. And a healthy Washington is a strong Washington.

Last year it became apparent that if the budget shortfall continued to grow, we would be forced to make cuts in the next biennium to the programs and services that have lifted thousands of Washingtonians out of despair and hopelessness. The governor's proposed budget, released in December 2008, was bad enough. But the bleak March 2009 revenue forecast made further reductions necessary.

We have reluctantly cut funding for vital health care programs such as Basic Health. Budget cuts aren't about dollars and cents but the people behind the numbers. With the health and safety of our citizens at risk, we tried to make the best of an impossible situation.

While it's understandable that people will criticize those painful reductions, we had little choice. Where we did have choice, we passed bills to strengthen the health care safety net in future years and put us on a path to health care reform that will protect the middle-class families.

We set the stage for long-term health care reform



*"The success or failure of any government in the final analysis must be measured by the well-being of its citizens. Nothing can be more important to a state than its public health; the state's paramount concern should be the health of its people."*

— Franklin Delano Roosevelt

in partnership with the Obama administration by creating an advisory group to monitor the status and outcomes of state activities and federal actions related to health care reform. We also authorized state agencies to submit a federal request to expand the Medicaid program to cover more low-income people. (SB 5945)

Out-of-control health care costs are a major threat to the American dream. Currently, administrative costs consume one third of every health care dollar. We took steps to drive down health care costs over time by having consumers, health providers and purchasers work together to establish

uniform standards for how services are authorized and reimbursed. This should simplify the health care system and bring down health care inflation. (SB 5346)

In 2007 Washington made a commitment to provide all children in the state with comprehensive health coverage by 2010. As a result, the number of uninsured children has dropped. Our commitment to the program remains strong. This session we passed legislation directing the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to step up outreach, enrollment and renewal efforts to improve the lives of children and help the



state qualify for more federal money. The bill also renames the children's health program the Apple Health for Kids Program and requires DSHS to develop performance measures. (HB 2128)

The bill delays the availability of children's health insurance for children in families with household income over 300 percent of the federal poverty level until January 1, 2010.

Electronic health records are seen as an important step in modernizing our nation's inefficient health care system. The federal stimulus package contains money for states to use electronic health records. We passed a bill establishing a framework for the secure exchange of health information. The legislation moves us to the forefront of states that may qualify for federal funds. (SB 5501)

We increased the minimum coverage for transplants from \$250,000 to \$350,000. (SB 5725)

We passed a law requiring assisted living facilities to disclose their Medicaid policies to anyone who is considering moving in. Too many frail, elderly residents of these facilities have been "evicted" after spending their life savings at the facility and "spending down" to a level that qualifies them for Medicaid. (SB 6009)

We took steps to protect patients from the potentially deadly infection MRSA by requiring hospitals to adopt MRSA policies and report incidence of MRSA to the Department of Health. (HB 1123)

We passed a bill to allow people who live with, and provide care to, an adult with developmental disabilities to receive respite services even though they are not the parent. (SB 5547)

We created a program to provide services for children with developmental disabilities who exhibit intense behaviors. (SB 5117)

We established the Community Health Care Collaborative Grant program to help community-based coalitions provide more services to the working poor and school children who are uninsured and underinsured. (SB 5360)

We created a pilot project to provide personal hygiene products and basic cleaning supplies to needy families. (SB 6053)

We passed a Senate Joint Memorial requesting that the president and members of Congress eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare enrollment for people with approved social security disabilities. (SJM 8013)