



turning promise into progress:

a plan of action for a new administration

January 2009



The arrival of a new Administration will provide an important opportunity for progress on issues of critical importance to women and families. The National Partnership has developed a comprehensive agenda to accomplish meaningful change on the key issues that shape the lives of women and families – health care and reproductive rights, work and family, workplace fairness, and judicial nominations. Our action agenda involves work in public and behind the scenes – leading coalitions; providing strategic advice on policies and appointments; meeting with key decision makers and transition teams; developing policies; educating the public; and engaging women, activists, advocates, policymakers, and the media – all aimed at advancing concrete policy changes that will improve the lives of women and families across the nation.

Making concrete progress on our key priorities has taken on greater urgency as millions of families face extraordinary economic upheaval and distress. The downward economic spiral has jeopardized the financial security and stability of families across the country – and achieving meaningful policy changes to improve the lives of everyday people now must be the top priority.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR: HEALTH CARE

Health care is central to the well-being of women and families. It is a key determinant of their quality of life, their economic security, and their ability to thrive, prosper and participate in our society. Indeed, ensuring that all individuals have access to quality health care will be a key determinant of our nation's vitality.

Unfortunately, this vitality is in jeopardy. Our current system is unraveling. Historic numbers of Americans lack health insurance, are underinsured, or live in fear of losing the coverage they have. Quality and safety problems are rampant and costs are out of control. The need for reform is clear and urgent. We must, as a nation, make quality, affordable health care available to all individuals.

One of the most pressing challenges facing the incoming President and Congress will be the persistent and critical need to overhaul the nation's health care system. The National Partnership is a leading and respected voice for women and families in the health care reform debate, and has a seat at the table where solutions will be crafted. We have the ear of policymakers, business leaders, and health care providers and we play a unique role in building coalitions that bring together stakeholders from across the spectrum. We are leading broad-based coalitions of nearly 200 organizations that are fighting for health reform, with particular attention to the needs of low-income, minority and elderly women and their caregivers.

Expanding Coverage – What's at Stake:

The continuing increase in the number of uninsured and underinsured Americans runs counter to our values and undermines our ability to prosper. Approximately 45 million Americans are uninsured and millions more are paying more than they can afford for health insurance that isn't there for them when they get sick. Thousands of Americans die every year simply because they do not have health insurance and are not able to access the routine care that could save their lives.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is working with the new President, his incoming health team, and Congress to craft comprehensive health reform legislation that will provide every woman, man and child with high quality, affordable health care. There is emerging consensus that the foundation for meaningful reform lies in shared

recognition that the quality of the care we receive today is unacceptable, costs are unsustainable, and the lack of coverage is inconsistent with basic American values. We are committed to enacting comprehensive health reform legislation that will ensure quality, affordable coverage for all people.

Improving Quality – What’s at Stake:

Today, patients receive only about 50 percent of recommended health care for their conditions, and too often receive care that is inappropriate or unnecessary. The quality of care people receive varies based on where they live, and there are significant disparities by race, ethnicity, gender, and language. Women and people of color receive lower quality health care even when factors like insurance status, income, age and severity of condition are accounted for. As our population ages and a growing number of Americans suffer from multiple chronic conditions, it is critical that our health care system ensures that people get high quality primary care and that there be good coordination of care. That won't happen as long as our payment system favors specialty care at the expense of primary care and care coordination, and pays huge sums for services and technologies to treat diseases that could have been prevented or controlled.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is leading a coalition of consumer advocates at the grassroots and national levels to promote a health care system that puts patients first by empowering them to be full partners in their care, and we are supporting research so we know what treatments work best for patients.
- ✓ The National Partnership is leading a coalition of consumer organizations that is advocating

for a stronger primary care system through approaches such as the “patient-centered medical home” – a new model of care gaining traction nationwide as a way to refocus our health care system on patients. A medical home is a physician office or clinic that offers an enhanced type of primary care. This approach could help move us toward more accessible, comprehensive, coordinated care and active involvement of patients and families in health care decisions.

Getting Costs Under Control – What’s at Stake:

The burden of cost is shared by all but falls most heavily on lower income women and families, people of color, and those who need health care the most. From 1999 to 2007, average employee contributions to their health insurance rose by 102 percent, while average wages increased by just three percent. Even worse, all the money we are spending isn't buying us better health. Quality is abysmal. Whether it's the wrong diagnosis, the wrong operation, or the wrong medication, preventable medical errors kill more than 180,000 Americans each year. And the way we pay for health care is actually contributing to poor quality, uncoordinated care.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is pressing for realignment of the incentives in our payment system to ensure that we encourage and reward delivery of the right care, at the right time, for the right reason, and at the right price. We are shaping congressional proposals to ensure that payment reform initiatives drive us toward a more patient-centered and affordable health care system.
- ✓ The National Partnership is also leading a project with employers to report on quality and reward the best care so that every patient receives the right care, at the right time, for the right reason, and at the right cost.

Giving People Better Information – What’s at Stake:

Consumers need good, reliable information about both the cost and quality of care in order to make educated decisions about their health care. Today, however, consumers have access to almost no comparative data. In fact, patients can learn more about the quality of a toaster oven than they can about their local hospital or doctor. Research has shown that when consumers have accurate information about treatment options and alternatives, they tend to make better, less invasive and less costly decisions. And these decisions often result in better outcomes.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is advocating for measuring the quality of care and publicly reporting the results. Measuring and reporting quality information have been shown to drive dramatic improvements in our system, and help consumers find and choose the best providers.
- ✓ The National Partnership is pushing for a robust federal commitment to comparative effectiveness research. We need it so that doctors and other health professionals can better understand the relative merits of diagnosis and treatment options, and so that consumers can make the best possible decisions for themselves and their families, and spend health care dollars as wisely as possible.

Fostering Adoption of Health IT – What’s at Stake:

Expanded use of health information technology (HIT) is critical to efforts to improve quality. An electronically connected health care system will empower patients to actively participate in their own care, improve clinical decision making and processes, reduce medical errors, and reduce the growth in health care costs. But the movement to interoperable HIT will only succeed if people trust that the personal health information contained within that system will be protected.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership helped win passage of a new law that makes prescribing practices safer by increasing the number of physicians participating in Medicare who adopt electronic prescribing. The National Partnership also leads the Consumer Partnership for eHealth, a coalition of consumer organizations working together to improve health care quality through expanded use of information technology. In the next Congress, we will work to pass legislation to help care providers adopt electronic health records and use it to improve quality and reduce costs while protecting the privacy and security of patients’ health information.

Reforming the Insurance Market – What’s at Stake:

In today’s insurance marketplace, dozens of health conditions – from cancer, to diabetes, to pregnancy – render many individuals “uninsurable” in most states. Even minor health conditions, such as hay fever or acne, can trigger a denial by some insurers. Insurance coverage is a critical component in staying healthy, as the un- and under-insured are more likely to go without needed health services. For example, uninsured women over age 40 are twice as likely as their insured counterparts to have gone without a mammogram in the past two years.



Action Steps

- ✓ The new President and Congress will be debating these issues, and the National Partnership will lead efforts to pass legislation to reform our insurance marketplace to ensure that affordable, meaningful coverage is available to all individuals. Our work is rooted in the core principle that health care is a human right, and we lead a broad-based coalition of almost 200 organizations working to make health insurance coverage accessible, meaningful and affordable.
- ✓ We will push for reforms to the insurance market that will:
 - *End discrimination* based on health, age and gender;
 - *Set a minimum benefit package* that protects people from financial hardship if and when they get sick; and
 - *Protect against insurance company "cherry picking"* of the youngest and healthiest patients.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR: REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

It is difficult to overstate the importance of reproductive health and rights in our lives. Nearly one-third of the worldwide burden of illness and early death among women is due to poor sexual and reproductive health. While the world's poorest nations carry much of this burden, even in the United States the failure to provide high quality reproductive health services harms women's health, with young people and low-income women most severely affected. Access to cost-effective preventive services does a tremendous amount to improve reproductive health outcomes, often with long term and sometimes life-saving results. The challenge moving forward is not a lack of knowledge, but a failure to make reproductive health care a priority.

Yet, many of the policies pursued by the Administration and Congress in recent years have created and exacerbated inequalities in access to care, demonized certain health services including abortion, and caused vital information to be withheld from youth. These policies have been promoted in the United States and also exported to the developing world.

The National Partnership believes the government can and should play a vital role in ensuring access to comprehensive, high quality and affordable reproductive health care. We are calling on the new Administration and Congress to take immediate steps to reverse harmful policies and to advance a comprehensive reproductive health agenda for all women – particularly those disadvantaged by poverty and discrimination.



Meeting the Need for Family Planning Services – What’s at Stake:

The continuing increase in the number of uninsured and underinsured Americans runs counter to our values and undermines our ability to prosper. Approximately 45 million Americans are uninsured and millions more are paying more than they can afford for health insurance that isn’t there for them when they get sick. Thousands of Americans die every year simply because they do not have health insurance and are not able to access the routine care that could save their lives.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership will continue its leadership in the broad-based coalition of women’s reproductive health advocates that is working to expand Medicaid coverage of family planning services; increase funding for the Title X family planning program to \$700 million; increase funding for CDC’s STD program to \$267 million; restore access to lower cost birth control at college clinics and those publicly-funded entities negatively impacted by changes to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005; and eliminate policies that restrict access to emergency contraception.

Removing Barriers to Reproductive Health Care– What’s at Stake:

Long-standing bans on public funding for abortion services have severely restricted access to safe abortion care for women who depend on the government for their health care. These policies disproportionately harm low-income women, women in the military, women of color, and certain immigrant women who already face significant barriers to receiving timely, high quality health care. More recently, a proposed Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) rule could open the door to further restrictions by allowing individuals and institutions to refuse to provide abortion and other reproductive health services for religious or moral reasons.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is helping lead efforts to urge the Administration and Congress to eliminate prohibitions on the use of public funds for abortion services and to enact the Freedom of Choice Act, which would prevent states and the federal government from interfering in a woman’s right to legal abortion. We will continue to be at the forefront of coalition efforts to reverse the proposed HHS refusal rule.

Promoting Comprehensive Sex Education – What’s at Stake:

More than eight in ten teen pregnancies in the United States are unintended and one in four young women has a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Access to comprehensive and accurate sex education does not cause young people to have sex, but it does help them reduce their risk of unintended pregnancy and STIs. Yet, since 1998, more than \$1.3 billion in federal dollars has been allocated for abstinence-only programs that are prohibited from addressing contraception, except to discuss failure rates. There is overwhelming evidence that this massive federal expenditure has failed.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is urging the Administration and Congress to invest in comprehensive sex education programs and eliminate federal funding for dangerous, ineffective, abstinence-only programs.
- ✓ We will help lead efforts to advance a proposal for federal investment in age-appropriate comprehensive sex education programs.

Reclaiming America's Global Leadership on Reproductive Health — What's at Stake:

U.S. investments in reproductive health can yield an array of benefits in developing countries, including improved maternal and child health, fewer unintended pregnancies and abortions, lower HIV rates and higher standards of living. But the “global gag rule” currently in place prevents foreign organizations from being eligible for desperately needed U.S. family planning funds if they use their own separate funds for legal abortion-related services or for advocating safe abortion laws and policies. In addition, for the last seven years a political interpretation of the federal Kemp-Kasten law has prevented congressionally-approved funds from going to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). More recently, this same law has been interpreted to prevent foreign governments from distributing donated U.S. contraceptives through clinics operated by Marie Stopes International.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is organizing advocates to convince policymakers to increase funding for overseas family planning and reverse harmful policies that harm reproductive health. We will urge the Administration and Congress to increase funding for USAID's overseas family planning programs to \$1 billion, including \$65 million for UNFPA. We will work with coalition partners to urge the new Administration to rescind the global gag rule and review interpretations of the Kemp-Kasten law that have reduced the ability of international non-governmental organizations including UNFPA to provide vital preventive and life-saving health services in some of the world's poorest nations.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR: WORK AND FAMILY

With gas and food prices rising and unemployment climbing, there has never been a worse time to lose a job. Yet every day workers risk their jobs in order to care for their health and their families. Millions of workers lack the basic protections they need to handle inevitable family or medical emergencies without putting their jobs – and the economic stability of their families – at risk.

The lack of workplace policies that support families has real consequences for workers, employers and the nation. The Public Welfare Foundation recently commissioned a poll, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, that found that one in six workers said that they or a family member has been fired, suspended, punished or threatened by an employer because they needed to take a sick day for themselves or a family member. The lack of these policies also undermines our public health. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll of workers in Ohio found that half of the respondents had gone to work sick in the past year because they could not afford to lose pay.

As a nationally recognized leader on these issues, the National Partnership has developed a bold plan for achieving concrete progress by pursuing three key priorities.



Paid Sick Days – What’s at Stake:

Nearly half the private sector workforce does not have a single paid sick day, including 78 percent of low-income workers. For these workers, a routine illness can mean the loss of a paycheck or a job. Without paid sick days and paid leave, restaurant workers with stomach flu have no choice but to handle our food, child care workers with strep must care for our kids, and moms and dads across the country are forced to send their children to school and to daycare when they are sick – or they leave them home alone.



Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership leads a coalition of more than 160 organizations in support of the federal Healthy Families Act. The Act will guarantee most workers seven paid sick days to use to care for their own health, to attend health care visits, or to care for a sick family member, without the risk of being disciplined or fired. The Act will be re-introduced in the new Congress, and we will lead the fight to secure its passage.
- ✓ At the same time, we are working with state partners to pass paid sick days legislation in states and cities throughout the United States. We expect that 15 states and cities will introduce paid sick days bills this year, and we will help them in these campaigns. The success of these measures in the states will help us move toward a federal standard.

Expanding and Protecting the Family and Medical Leave Act – What’s at Stake:

More than half of private sector workers do not qualify for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). For these workers, a new child or serious illness in the family could signal financial disaster due to loss of a job and health insurance.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership wrote the Family and Medical Leave Act and led the eight year fight to make it law. We are working with lawmakers to expand the law to: cover more employees at smaller companies, as well as part time workers; expand the definition of covered family members, including domestic partners; allow FMLA leave to be used to help recover from domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking; and allow parents to use up to 24 hours per year to participate in their children’s school-related activities. As a first step
- to expanding the FMLA, we are working to pass the Airline Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act, to allow flight crews to be eligible for FMLA leave.
- ✓ In the waning days of the Bush Administration, the Department of Labor issued changes to the FMLA that make it more difficult for workers to access the leave the law already provides. In the new Administration, we will continue leading the fight to have these changes reversed.

Paid Family and Medical Leave Act Insurance – What’s at Stake:

The vast majority of workers receive no pay at all if they need to take extended leave for serious illness or to care for a new child, so even if they qualify for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, many cannot afford to take it.

Action Steps

- ✓ Because the unpaid family and medical leave the FMLA provides is a practical impossibility for many workers, the National Partnership is working to advance paid leave for all workers to use to address their own serious health condition, a family member's serious health condition, or to take time away from work to bond with a new child. The first step is passage of the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act, which will guarantee federal workers four weeks of paid leave to bond with a new child and demonstrate that paid leave is workable and effective. We are leading the fight to pass this law.
- ✓ The National Partnership is also working to secure federal funding to help states adopt paid leave systems, and to support states that are already moving forward on paid leave while we fight for comprehensive federal legislation that ensures paid leave for all workers.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR: WORKPLACE FAIRNESS



For decades, the National Partnership has made women's equality in the workplace a central priority. This goal is rooted in our longstanding and unflinching commitment to equal protection under the law and equal opportunity for women – and our belief that women's equality is inextricably linked to their workplace success and economic security. While women have made extraordinary progress over the last four decades, discrimination remains an ever-present reality. Women continue to face disparities in their wages and career advancement opportunities. While women comprise nearly half of the workforce (47 percent), women are a much smaller percentage of managers (only 12.5 percent). That percentage drops to a stunningly low 1.3 percent for women of color. Fueling these disparities are discriminatory practices that continue to infect the workplace. In FY2007, for example, almost 25,000 complaints of sex discrimination in employment were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The National Partnership has helped lead the effort to ensure vigorous enforcement of employment discrimination laws and prevent rollbacks of critical antidiscrimination protections. Our agenda over the next year will focus special attention on four key areas where there may be new opportunities to make important progress for women.

Equal Pay and Pay Discrimination – What's at Stake:

Despite gains over the last four decades, women continue to be paid less than their male counterparts. Women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. For women of color, the disparity is even wider – African American women earn 64 cents and Latinas earn 53 cents for every dollar earned by a white man. This persistent pay gap has been made worse by recent court decisions limiting victims' ability to file pay discrimination claims, and by Bush Administration actions making it more difficult to uncover discriminatory pay practices.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is leading efforts to restore and strengthen critical legal protections against pay discrimination. We are working with our coalition partners to secure passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act – which would correct the Supreme Court's decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* and make clear that pay discrimination claims can be filed within 180 days of each discriminatory paycheck.
- ✓ We also are pushing for passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act, which will protect workers against retaliation for discussing an employer's pay practices, provide more investigative tools to strengthen federal enforcement efforts, and require employers to have legitimate, job-related reasons for pay differences. Passage of both bills will be top priorities in the 111th Congress.

Pregnancy Discrimination – What’s at Stake:

Thirty years after passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, pregnancy discrimination claims are on the rise. Since 1992, pregnancy discrimination claims have skyrocketed by 65 percent. This jump reveals that more and more women are at risk of losing their jobs or being treated unfairly at work simply because they are or might become pregnant.



Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership has undertaken groundbreaking research to draw attention to the increase in pregnancy discrimination claims, and to identify causes and potential solutions. We are building on this research to advance a comprehensive initiative to reduce pregnancy discrimination claims, and are pushing for increased federal enforcement such as an increase in case filings and a nationwide public education campaign to educate employees and employers about the law.

Affirmative Action – What’s at Stake:

Affirmative action has been instrumental in remedying discrimination and expanding opportunities for women and people of color. Increasingly, affirmative action is under attack, with opponents aggressively working to constrain or undo effective programs that have been critical for women’s progress.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership has long worked to uphold and defend lawful affirmative action programs that have helped women make gains in the workplace, education, and business. Over the next year, we will focus on undoing harmful rules put in place by the Bush Administration that have undermined effective affirmative action programs, such as recent regulations that limit federal contracts targeted at women-owned businesses.

Enforcement of Employment Discrimination Laws – What’s at Stake:

Fairness in the workplace depends on the vigorous enforcement of employment discrimination laws. The Bush Administration has taken a step backwards, with key agencies lacking necessary resources and posting uneven enforcement numbers in key areas.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is playing a lead role in strengthening federal enforcement of employment discrimination laws, targeting key agencies where enforcement numbers have shown the steepest decline. We took the lead, with coalition partners, to develop a transition enforcement agenda. It includes urging a wholesale internal review at key agencies such as the Department of Justice and Department of Labor, and pushing for stepped up enforcement efforts targeting sex, race and pay discrimination. At the EEOC, we will push to increase the agency’s resources and assess its staffing needs. These improvements will help to ensure that key enforcement agencies are well-positioned to combat and eliminate discriminatory employment practices.

A PLAN OF ACTION FOR: JUDGES AND THE COURTS



For decades, our nation has relied on judges and the courts to clarify constitutional and legal principles, protect our rights, and ensure equal justice under law for all. But the selection of judges has taken on a special urgency in recent years – the Bush Administration’s relentless push to elevate far-right ideologues to the bench has shifted the balance of the courts and put precious civil rights, women’s rights, reproductive rights, and other constitutional and legal protections at risk. In this environment, it is even more critical to identify nominees of the highest caliber, who are committed to applying the law in a fair, even-handed, and unbiased manner without regard to their personal views or political goals.

As a leading expert on judicial nominations, the National Partnership is known for the diverse expertise it brings to the debates over judges and the courts. Behind the scenes as well as before the public, National Partnership leaders have shaped debates both on Supreme Court and federal judicial nominations numerous times in the past, providing context, authoritative advice and strategic counsel to Members of Congress and their staffs, administration officials, journalists, coalition partners and, in some cases, nominees themselves. We expect to devote special attention to the judicial selection process over the next year to draw attention to the importance of selecting nominees committed to ensuring that our courts and laws operate fairly.



Judicial Nominations – What’s at Stake:

The elevation of so many far right conservatives to the Supreme Court and federal lower courts has resulted in narrow, constrained interpretations of law that have weakened the ability of women and people of color to vindicate their rights – and it threatens to do even more damage in coming years.

Action Steps

- ✓ The National Partnership is continuing to push for judicial nominees with a demonstrated commitment to equal justice under law, and to oppose nominees with records that would put at risk rights of critical importance to women and people of color. In particular, we are working to uphold constitutional and legal rights protecting women’s equality, privacy, and health.
- ✓ We are pursuing multiple strategies to educate all women about the importance of judicial nominations and court decisions in their everyday lives, and to create a broader base of activists who are willing and able to engage in any future debates surrounding judicial nominations.
- ✓ We continue researching and producing materials about the records of pending nominees, and providing technical assistance to policymakers and their staff and the media. Our extensive experience working on judicial nominations positions us well to help shape public opinion about judicial nominees and the courts, explain why the selection of judges is important, and highlight what is at stake for women in the ongoing judicial nominations debate.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is dedicated to promoting public policies and business practices that expand opportunities for women and improve the well-being of our nation's families.

We believe that actions speak louder than words, and for more than 35 years we have played a critical role in enacting landmark policy from prohibiting pregnancy discrimination to giving 60 million Americans family and medical leave. Today, we promote fairness in the workplace, access to quality and affordable health care, and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family.

Founded in 1971 as the Women's Legal Defense Fund, the National Partnership is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)3 organization located in Washington, DC.

1875 connecticut avenue, nw, suite 650 ~ washington, dc 20009
202.986.2600 ~ 202.986.2539 (fax) ~ info@nationalpartnership.org

