

# **Medicare's Anniversary Organizing Toolkit**

[www.healthcare-now.org](http://www.healthcare-now.org)

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Thank you for downloading Medicare's Anniversary Organizing Toolkit. In this packet we will describe ideas and activities that advocates have used in the past to raise awareness about single-payer in their communities, and build their local organizing campaigns to win this important issue.

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## 1. Why Celebrate the Anniversary of Medicare?



Medicare is one of the most successful social insurance programs in the nation. As advocates for a publicly-funded, universal, single-payer healthcare system, we know that Medicare has a successful history of providing universal coverage to those who are 65 and older and those with certain medical conditions and disabilities.

The impact of implementing Medicare has lifted millions out of poverty, created longer and healthier lives, reduced health disparities, and created a successful single-

payer program in the United States.

One of the most important lessons we can take from the passage of Medicare nearly fifty years ago is that, by acknowledging all seniors deserved healthcare coverage, our government established healthcare as a human right for people 65 and older in the United States. Since then, Medicare has become a hugely popular program with the public – mobilizing tens of thousands when it’s threatened – and has a proven track record of success. With low administrative costs and good outcomes, isn’t it time we guaranteed Medicare for all?

Opponents attack Medicare by claiming it will go broke or doesn’t work. Admittedly, Medicare needs improvements such as moving away from fee for service, improving reimbursement amounts, and eliminating the role of the private market in medigap plans and prescription drug coverage.

However, these attacks disregard the real reason why Medicare is costly. The reality is that all healthcare costs are increasing because of the wasteful and greedy private insurance industry and the inability for our healthcare non-system to control costs.

Medicare’s anniversary is an opportunity for us to unite in our fight for universal healthcare. Citing the history of Medicare and using it to instill pride in our national public programs will help people outside the movement understand that the government has a role to play in guaranteeing healthcare to residents of the United States.

July is also an opportunity for us to demand our legislators protect and strengthen Medicare by implementing improved Medicare for all.

## 2. Basic Facts about Medicare

- Medicare was signed into law on July 30, 1965 as part of the “Great Society” vision

implemented by Lyndon Johnson.

- Medicare is a government-run single-payer healthcare system.
- Medicare guarantees coverage to all seniors and people with disabilities regardless of their income, health status or place of residence.
- Social Security and Medicare have proven to be the most successful social programs in our nation's history – without them the poverty rate for seniors would be at 48% instead of 10%.
- Medicare provides coverage to 45 million older Americans and Americans with disabilities.
- For more information, check out these resources:
  - Medicare: A National Treasure – [http://www.medicarerights.org/pdf/Medicare\\_A\\_National\\_Treasure.pdf](http://www.medicarerights.org/pdf/Medicare_A_National_Treasure.pdf)
  - A handout on Ryan's proposal to eliminate Medicare – [http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/HSN\\_RYAN\\_HALFSHEET1.pdf](http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/HSN_RYAN_HALFSHEET1.pdf)
  - We Need Medicare for All – [http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/john\\_nichols/article\\_11940987-f7ac-59c9-85b2-a1cec1739844.html](http://host.madison.com/ct/news/opinion/column/john_nichols/article_11940987-f7ac-59c9-85b2-a1cec1739844.html)

### 3. Examples of local events/activities you can organize.

#### A) Public Celebrations:

Organizing a public celebration of the anniversary of Medicare on or around July 30th is an easy way to engage your local community in the fight for single-payer healthcare.



To organize a public celebration:

- Meet with your core group of organizers and supporters and identify leadership roles in each of the following categories (Please note this list is not complete – depending on your specific event, you may want to add or delete categories.):
  - Outreach – Your outreach coordinator will help you answer the questions about who you will invite, what populations in your community you want to target, if you should invite your federal/state elected officials, etc.
  - Logistics – Where will you hold your event? Can you find a place, like a church or a union hall, willing to donate space for your event? Do you want to deliver a birthday card and message directly to the office of your elected official? How will people get there – public transportation? Car pools? Renting a bus? Who will set up the table/microphone/ equipment at the event? Etc.
  - Materials – What will you distribute to people to tell them about single-payer healthcare or your local organizing group? Will it be a flier for the next meeting? Information on single-payer and the right to healthcare? \*Make sure to have sign up sheets so that you can get the contact info for everyone who attends. This is one of the most important parts to any event you organize because you want to be able to follow up with people and engage them in

further activities.

- Food – Making a cake or cupcakes is one way to celebrate Medicare’s “birthday” and theme your event.
- Here’s a sample agenda for what you might want to do at your event with a suggested amount of time to allot to each part:
  - 5 minutes – welcome everyone/talk about the importance of the event
  - 10 minutes – someone speaks on the importance of Medicare
  - 10 minutes – talk about single-payer healthcare and the organizing work happening in your community (\*This would be a good opportunity to encourage your community members to endorse single-payer legislation, tell them about another event you’re organizing, etc.)
  - 10 minutes – share healthcare horror stories (invite people to talk about their personal experiences with the private health insurance system)
  - 10 minutes – sing, celebrate, cut the birthday cake, etc. (\*Be sure to film this activity and email it to Healthcare-NOW! national and the staff of your elected officials.).
  - 20 minutes/half an hour – spend time mingling and relationship building (\*Make sure everyone signs up and pledges to get more involved.)

#### B) Demonstrations:

For those who feel that we needn't be celebrating with the elected officials who have continued to fail us in meeting our right to healthcare, demonstrations targeting private health insurance companies or the offices of your members of Congress are a great organizing tactic.



- Here is a link to a great online organizing kit about demonstrations at private health insurance companies: <http://www.healthcare-now.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/protesttoolkit.pdf>.

#### C) People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs):

A gathering of people in a community who come together to identify community issues, discuss solutions, and commit to actions.

- This model of organizing came out of the US Social Forum in 2010. The PMA model is being developed by a national leadership team that Healthcare-NOW! is proud to be a part of.
- We helped to organize a broad group of representatives in Detroit to come together to talk about healthcare, identify the major problem facing healthcare reform activists, and strategize collectively about what to do about it.
- The PMA is a great way to bring together people in your community to identify strategic opportunities for moving forward on this issue together. Healthcare impacts people in many different ways from the environmental impacts, racial disparities, attacks on women's reproductive health, and more. The PMA represents a format

that can bring people together on an equal level to discuss this moment.

- Find out more about Healthcare-NOW!'s PMA in Detroit here <http://www.healthcare-now.org/campaigns/peoples-movement-assembly/> and the national PMA here <http://www.ussf2010.org/pma>.

#### D) Video Testimonials:

Put your story on the map! We are launching a video testimonial campaign to show the nation who supports Medicare for all and why.

- Check out this link on our website for more information on how to participate in this project: <http://www.healthcare-now.org/campaigns/single-payer-rally/why-i-want-medicare-for-all/>

E) Design your own activity, event, or action. July is a great opportunity to build our base, add more people to our network and databases, and grow our movement. The first step in base-building is always engaging new people, so work with your friends and other single-payer supporters to figure out what would draw in new people in your community. Feel free to be creative and just make sure you have fun!

## 4. The importance of outreach



If you are organizing an event, and you want to reach a specific community or population of people with your message, it is critical to organize with intentionality. This means that you can't just plan an event and invite only supporters and allies, but that you need to take the time to reach out to leaders and members of

this specific community and get them involved in the planning.

For example, if your coalition wishes to have people with disabilities highlighted as beneficiaries of Medicare to show their successes, or challenges, with the program, then you need to ensure wheelchair accessible space is secured for your event, all advertising materials include specific language targeted to people with disabilities, you reach out to disability advocacy groups in your area, etc.

If you want to reach younger people, then bringing them into leadership positions and allowing them to craft an event that will reach their peers is necessary.

\*A best practice in organizing is that “buy-in” for a project is greatest at the launching of an idea. Having a variety of people at the table in the beginning stages of planning is a great way to be inclusive from the get-go.

Here is a sample letter that Healthcare-NOW! Georgia used in their outreach around Medicare's anniversary:

Dear Friends,

July 30th marks the 46th anniversary of Medicare, a publicly-funded health insurance system that covers almost everyone over 65. Healthcare Now-GA thinks that date would be a good occasion to CELEBRATE & defend Medicare against privatization proposals and also to reach out to all who fight for health justice, health rights and improved Medicare for All!

Medicare's passage in 1965 was a milestone in the struggle to provide affordable healthcare to all. Today, Medicare, Social Security & Medicaid are under attack by Republicans and Democrats alike. They can succeed if we fail to come together.

Many young people fear that Medicare or Social Security will not be there for them.

Women's reproductive justice rights have been thrown under the bus in the most recent healthcare reform legislation.

Undocumented residents of our state often cannot access healthcare without fear of criminal charges and deportation.

Many of us are restricted financially and otherwise from choosing the health care practitioner of our choice, whether it is a doctor, doula, healing arts practitioner, nurse or lay midwife.

Billions are spent on useless war while our healthcare is rationed.

Do you share these concerns? Can we come together with a vision for single payer health insurance – everybody in, nobody out? Can we plan how best to mark the July 30th anniversary of Medicare?

We'll meet at 4 p.m. Saturday, June 4th at the Atlanta Friends Meeting House, 701 West Howard Avenue, Decatur. Interested? RSVP to [ri...@mindspring.com](mailto:ri...@mindspring.com). Bring your ideas, your lens on healthcare justice for all, and let's come up with a plan!

Healthcare Now-GA  
Rita Valentie  
Margie Rece

## **5. Simple steps for doing press outreach**

When planning a public event, it's important to connect with your local media because they can help you spread your message further. Earned media coverage can magnify your message and spread it beyond the attendees at your event.

Here are a few simple steps to take to engage with the press in your area:

- Write a press release about your event (see below for a sample press release).
- Email/fax it to local press contacts (you can find your local press contacts here: <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/media/>).
- Follow up with your media contacts by phone after sending them the press release to make sure they have received it and answer any questions they may have with a brief pitch:
  - i.e. Healthcare-NOW! Georgia is celebrating the forty-sixth anniversary of Medicare on July 30<sup>th</sup>, and I'm calling to make sure you received our press release. At a time when Medicare is being violently threatened, we think it's incredibly important for our community to be able to see what is being done to stop it.
- Send a follow up press release with photos attached no later than one day after your event.

## **SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Katie Robbins, National Organizer, Healthcare-NOW!

[Katie@healthcare-now.org](mailto:Katie@healthcare-now.org), 215-732-2131

Health Care Supporters Say "Hands Off Our Medicare!"

Don't let Congress Cut Medicare: Improve It and Expand It to All

(Philadelphia, PA) – On the eve of Medicare's 45<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Healthcare-NOW! (HCN) reminds the country that "for decades, Medicare's critics have warned of impending doom for the program but it always gets repaired. Here's our suggested fix: eliminate the massive waste and expense caused by private for-profit insurance companies. Put the savings into Medicare – protect it, improve it, and expand it to all from birth to death!"

Since its establishment in 1965, Medicare has been a national treasure providing coverage to 45 million people 65 and older and those with disabilities. It maintains low administrative costs, allowing more money to go directly to healthcare and not bloated administration or advertising which consumes one third of the healthcare dollar spent in the private sector.

This anniversary holds special weight because of the formation of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, aka the Deficit Commission, which is looking to recommend cuts to Medicare and Social Security as soon as this December.

Affiliates of HCN have organized dozens of actions nationwide to bring attention to the birthday of Medicare and the actions of the Deficit Commission. “We aren’t going to be silent about threats to our most successful social insurance programs,” said Sandy Fox of the Western PA Coalition for Single Payer Health Care. “Medicare and Social Security aren’t adding to the deficit. If the Deficit Commission was serious about curbing costs, they would examine HR 676, ‘Expanded and Improved Medicare for All,’ which would save hundreds of billions of dollars and provide everyone with guaranteed, quality healthcare.”

Katie Robbins, HCN’s National Organizer addressed the Deficit Commission at their public meeting in June, “Since H.R. 676 was introduced in 2003, it has received tremendous support including endorsements by 582 union organizations in 49 states, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 63 local governments which include 10 of the nation’s 30 largest cities...and the majority of nurses, patients, and physicians.”

HCN and its supporters are urging members of Congress and federal candidates to take a pledge declaring that they will protect Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security by taking them off the table of the Deficit Commission and calling for a single-payer, Improved Medicare for All System (HR 676) be put back into the national discussion.

HCN has recently launched a website, [www.handsoffourmedicare.org](http://www.handsoffourmedicare.org), which aims to inform all who are interested in and concerned about the activities of the Deficit Commission by providing updates and information on the Deficit Commission, as well as the campaign to preserve and protect Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid.

For more information on the anniversary of Medicare, please visit [www.healthcare-now.org](http://www.healthcare-now.org).

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## 6. Sample Talking Points to use when speaking to Elected Officials or the Media



- We are here celebrating the anniversary of Medicare because it represents the solution to our healthcare crisis – not the problem. Medicare is popular because it works for people who are on it. Medicare keeps administrative costs low – just under 3% -- so that more money goes to healthcare rather than CEO salaries, marketing or administrative waste.

- Medicare is falsely blamed for

bankrupting the federal government, but the real reason Medicare costs are rising is because of the increasing costs of the private health insurance industry.

- Medicare for all makes Medicare sustainable for future generations. Expanded and improved Medicare for all will eliminate 31 cents of every dollar wasted on private health insurance bureaucracy – saving \$400 billion dollars a year.
- By eliminating the for-profit private insurance industry, Medicare for all will be able to use these funds to deliver comprehensive, high quality healthcare to everyone and eliminate financial or other barriers to care.
- The best guarantee that Medicare will provide quality healthcare to all is if everyone is in the same risk pool.
- By implementing an improved Medicare for all program:
  - the government will be able to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower the price of prescription medicine;
  - hospitals will operate on an annual budget;
  - money formerly wasted on administrative overhead can be used for clinical care and to eliminate co-pays and deductibles.

## 7. Sample Letter to the Editor

Letters-to-the-editor are a great way to educate members of your community on single-payer. Be sure to remember timeliness is key for writing effective LtoE – they are most likely to be published when they are in response to a recent article or community issue. \*Newspapers have different LtoE requirements – be sure to call beforehand to find out where to send your letter and what the length limits are (usually 150-200 words).

Example:

To the Editor:

According to a recent story (“Ryan urges privatization of Medicare,” April 13), Representative Paul Ryan is quoted as saying, “Medicare costs are bankrupting the federal government.” I think this analysis fails to shed light on the real issue: administrative waste perpetrated by private health insurance companies. Because of their profit-driven focus, the health insurance industry drives up costs by spending one-third of every healthcare dollar on marketing, CEO’s salaries, etc. Medicare covers 45 million senior Americans and Americans with disabilities, yet its overhead costs are only 3%. Privatizing Medicare will only force rates to go up even more because this population of people, who in general have increased healthcare needs, will be thrust into the private market with a flimsy voucher to help pay for health costs. The way to fix our health and

financial crises is by increasing and expanding Medicare for all – this will reduce administrative waste, allow the government to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies to lower prescription drug costs, and centralize patients' medical information for improved quality of care.

\*It's important to remember that the most important quality of an LtoE is that it is concise – avoid political rhetoric and remember shorter is better!

## 8. Resources for Organizers

Healthcare-NOW! can help provide:

- Organizing support from our national staff for your events
- A sample press release for your event
- Signs that say “Medicare: The Solution NOT the Problem!”
- Booklets that describe the Medicare for all solution ([http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/HCN\\_PAMPHLET\\_020811.pdf](http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/HCN_PAMPHLET_020811.pdf))
- Postcards calling for Congress to protect Medicare and fight to expand and improve it for all (<http://www.healthcare-now.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/card.pdf>)
- Talking Points (<http://www.healthcare-now.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/TalkingPointsonMedicareandSocSec.pdf>)

## 9. Base-Building

It is very important that these actions help us build our networks of supporters for Medicare for All. We must continue to grow if we want our movement to succeed, and the way to grow is by getting more people informed and engaged in our work. As organizers in for Medicare for All, it is critical that you use tools to gather people's contact information, track this information in a database for your organization, and provide meaningful opportunities for people to engage in the movement. For more information on Outreach and Base Building please check out our Outreach Guide here: [http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/singlepayernow\\_zine.pdf](http://www.healthcare-now.org/docs/singlepayernow_zine.pdf).

For more information, comments, or questions, please don't hesitate to contact Healthcare-NOW!'s national office at 1-800-453-1305 or [info@healthcare-now.org](mailto:info@healthcare-now.org).