Policies to Transform Primary Care: The Gateway to Better Health and Health Care

More people receive care from a primary care provider each month than any other health professional. Primary care providers often serve as an entry point in the health care system - connecting patients to the other specialists, treatment options and even social services needed to get and stay healthy. Additionally, we know that primary care is associated with better health outcomes and lower costs – particularly for patients with complex health needs. But even given all this, consumers must still overcome significant obstacles to access high quality primary care. For example:

- Affordability barriers
- Locating and accessing a primary care provider
- Finding care that meets their needs
- Significant disparities in the quality of care patients receive

Because primary care is the gateway to the health system, a transformed health system that meets the health needs of all people must start with re-envisioning how we deliver primary care. If we can utilize primary care to catch chronic health issues or social needs early and address those needs in a coordinated and comprehensive way, it is possible to lower health care costs, improve health outcomes and patient satisfaction, and begin to tackle health disparities. Advocates and policymakers who are working towards a truly patient-centered health system must begin addressing the legislative, administrative and cultural barriers standing in the way of a primary care policy agenda that will move us closer to this vision.

Addressing the problems with primary care access and quality will require a multifaceted approach at the federal and state levels. The menu of policy options presented in this accompanying chart, when taken together, would move us towards a health system that centers high quality, accessible, person-centered primary care. For more details about the problems facing primary care today and the policy solutions needed to address these problems, see our full report: Policies to Transform Primary Care: The Gateway to Better Health and Health Care.

Sally and Edna's story embodies the problems caused by a lack of communication and coordination in primary care. Learn more: healthinnovation.org/work/stories

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Steps to a Transformed Primary Care System

Remove financial barriers	Change the way care is paid for	Reform the way primary care is delivered	Build out connections between primary care and social services	Improve access to primary care by expanding the primary care infrastructure	Experiment with non-traditional primary care models
Do away with Medicare co-pays for primary care services	Revise policies for determining Medicare primary care payment	Improve Medicare access to home-based primary care	Promote social needs screening and referrals	Expand scholarship and loan forgiveness programs	Advance multi-payer medical home models
Require first-dollar coverage of primary care services in high-deductible health plans	Advance innovative and value-based payment models in primary care	Allow same day billing for different providers in Medicaid	Strengthen the Health Home to address the social determinants of health	Improve and strengthen the Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program	Advance Universal Primary Care initiatives
Close the Coverage Gap	Pass legislation requiring measurement/minimum levels of primary care spending	Promote co-location of behavioral health and oral health services within primary care	Promote models that directly integrate of primary care and social services at a single site	Establish a "pipeline" program to encourage students to enter into primary care professions	Promote the delivery of primary care as part of comprehensive, community-based models
Ensure safety-net coverage for immigrant populations		Advance Community Paramedicine initiatives		Expand the number of Graduate Medical Education (GME) slots for primary care	Promote member/patient owned primary care models
				Expand Medicaid reimbursement for Community Health Workers	Allow for reimbursement across payers for virtual primary care platforms

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