

## ALL Partners Deserve Health Care

Congress is considering legislation to extend domestic partner benefits to federal employees. This is an important step towards increasing fairness in access to health care for unmarried people. But it falls short in three ways.

Speak Up!

Tell Congress to create

'plus-one' benefits for

all federal employees!

First, it falls short of the standard set by other employers. According to a 2004 report by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 95% of employers that cover domestic partners do so inclusively: their employees' partners can access health care without regard to gender. They offer the same benefits to opposite-sex partners that they do to same-sex partners: Bechtel, EDS (Electronic Data Systems, part of Hewlett Packard), McKesson Corp., Northrop Grumman, and SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation).

It is important to remember that domestic partner benefits were originally offered to recognize family diversity in the workplace, not as an alternative to same-sex marriage. The first known employer to include domestic partner benefits policy was The Village Voice newspaper. In 1982, it made "marital" employment benefits available to unmarried different-sex employees in long-term relationships. Only later did The Voice expand its policy to include same-sex domestic partners.

In fact, a growing number of employers are honoring diversity by extending benefits beyond domestic partners. Insurance companies Nationwide and Prudential offer benefits to extended family or household members, as do the Universities of Kentucky and Michigan. The federal government already allows employees to use sick-time to care for any household member.

As the largest public-sector employer, the federal government should extend health insurance to its employees plus one adult, or, second-best, to all domestic partners (same-sex and different-sex) of federal employees.

- Employers without DP benefits are at a competitive disadvantage. One survey of 279 human resources professionals representing 19 industries found that domestic partnership benefits were among the top three most effective incentives for recruiting new hires, regardless of sexual orientation.

Second, it falls short of the needs of federal employees. It is not fair to offer benefits only to federal employees who are married or not allowed to marry. If the federal government sees the value of supporting employees' families, then it should seek to support all true families.

Many Americans have primary caretaking responsibilities for siblings, parents, neighbors or friends. These responsibilities fill the function of family not only for these workers and the people they care for, but also for the larger society which is spared from allocating public caretaking resources. Narrow definitions of family damage people's health and make it harder for them to fulfill their actual family responsibilities.

Unmarried families exist for myriad reasons. As a whole, they have more in common with the universe of married families than any one married family has in common with any other married family. All people should freely choose whether to marry; no one should be forced into the complex, often costly or unavailable, legal status of marriage simply by the need for health care.

- The unmarried are less likely to have health care. A 2006 study compiled by Women's Voices, Women Vote found that "Unmarried voters are twice as likely as married voters to be without coverage, and unmarried non-voters are four times as likely to go without coverage." That study further found that over a third of unmarried Latinos and nearly a quarter of unmarried African Americans have no health insurance coverage, compared to less than one fifth of unmarried whites.

Third, it falls short of the reality of the majority of American households. Since 2005, the majority of American households have been headed by unmarried people. The number of unmarried people reporting themselves to the Census as domestic partners is rising quickly, passing 13 million in 2007; about 1.5 million are in same-sex couples. Nearly 4.7 million children are being raised by domestic partners.

Meanwhile, unmarried partners represent less than 15% of the over 93 million unmarried adults in America, and only about a third of unmarried adults live alone. The majority of unmarried people live with other people in a web of important relationships. Many of these relationships serve as families, and they deserve equal access to health care; yet, they are more likely to be uninsured than other families.

The fact is that married households are a shrinking proportion of American society, and the economic and demographic trends behind this fact are not going away. We marry for love and divorce when love is lost; we marry older; we live longer; we cherish our economic independence; we place high value on a variety of relationships; we define our families to include all the people we care for, not just the ones who are government-certified. The American people rightly expect the federal government to reflect the people's values and to respect the people's real lives.

[Learn more about domestic partner benefits.](#)

[Learn more about employment-based health insurance.](#)