



# 2009 Health Reform Policy Brief National Health Report Card

## The Problem

Current health data compilations, reports and rating systems (while necessary for research, program assessment and policy making) are ill-suited to the needs of a national dialogue on the overall scope, direction and effectiveness of national health reform. The sheer volume of data and indicators now widely available online from public and private sources allows any group to divert the national discussion away from the key objectives of national reform: Controlling medical spending, expanding access to care and making the United States the healthiest nation.

## The Solution

Congress should authorize a high level, bi-partisan group to designate fewer than ten national indicators against which the media, the public and political leaders can gauge the success of national health reform. The measures should be widely accepted for their reliability, publicly understood to be related to reform's primary objectives and widely reported to the public on a regular basis—in much the same style as now obtains for the 'leading economic indicators'.

**Healthiest State Reform Themes:** *System Re-Design*

**Healthiest State Measures:** *Overall outcomes, health disparities*

## Discussion

Health reports and rankings are used by a wide variety of international, national, and state agencies and organizations to monitor a vast selection of health measures. The World Health Organization's [Statistical Information System](#), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's [Dashboard on Healthcare Quality](#), the United Health Foundation's [America's Health Rankings](#), and published report cards in the states of [Washington](#), [Colorado](#) and [Wisconsin](#) are current examples of available reports. Although the aforementioned systems are thorough and accurate, most of them contain more than two dozen health measures with some reporting on more than one hundred separate measures. The sheer volume of data dilutes its value for broad based discussions of the effects of national policy.

By using only a few widely accepted health measures as national goals, the effectiveness of goal setting would be maximized. It is widely accepted in organizational psychology and management theory that clear and difficult goals are the most effective. <sup>i</sup> By establishing a small number of national measures that are widely visible and available, a national report card could present

hard to reach but attainable goals that all Americans might be encouraged to participate in achieving. In addition, a periodic report could provide feedback and encourage commitment to national and individual improvement, both of which are established moderators of the effectiveness of goal setting.<sup>ii</sup> Finally, goal setting works best when individuals can control their performance and experience a tangible personal benefit.<sup>iii</sup> When health reform is passed, a national health report card could be a tool to encourage individuals to make healthy choices to the best of their abilities with the ultimate goal being that all Americans experience the tangible personal benefits of improved health and lower healthcare costs.

The Healthiest State Campaign uses the [Healthiest State Report Card](#) as a benchmark and a guide for improving the collective health of Washington state. In our effort to become the healthiest state in the nation, the report card has highlighted areas in need of improvement, and it has allowed our state to celebrate those areas in which it is a national leader. Since the beginning of the Healthiest State Campaign in 2004 and the publication of the first Healthiest State Report Card in 2006, more than 40,000 individuals and 1,300 organizations have rallied around the goal of improving the national ranking of Washington state. By focusing on seventeen measures and outcomes, providing feedback and encouragement through various media, and encouraging state residents to invest to the overall health of the state, Washington recently became the 10<sup>th</sup> healthiest state in the nation.

In addition to creating a series of collective statewide goals, by consolidating relevant and recognizable measures and outcomes, the Healthiest State Report Card provides a tool that can be easily used and understood. Publishing the report card and citing specific measures, as well as showing whether or not Washington State has gained ground or fallen in each national health ranking, has helped to focus discussions and policy efforts within state government.

## Proposal

Congress should authorize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Surgeon General or any National Health Board that might be created under health reform to submit for Senate confirmation no more than ten broad and highly recognizable health indicators. These should be recommended for use by the public, policy makers and the media as broad gauges of the effectiveness of national health reform to achieve its primary objectives of health care cost containment, increased access to care and population health improvement. Upon approval, these numbers should be published widely at least once each year. The measures should be population wide and reported by race/ethnicity and income. They should be certified by the CDC for accuracy and reliability. The measures should include a limited, simple and understandable combination of medical care cost, access to care, and social determinants of health.

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<sup>i</sup> [Great Minds in Management](#), Ken G. Smith Michael A Hitt, Ch. 7: Goal Setting Theory, Edwin A. Locke & Gary P Latham, p 129.

<sup>ii</sup> Id.

<sup>iii</sup> Id. at 130.