

Public option?

Should health care reform include a "public option," in which a government plan would compete with private insurers?

Yes

Henry Kahn, Atlanta physician, professor emeritus at Emory University School of Medicine

Our uniquely American "experiment" with private health financing has failed. It's time for a major change. Private plans restrict patient choice of doctors, hospitals and treatments. Increasing numbers of Americans are left entirely without health care. Yet our country's annual health bill averages out to over \$8,000 per person — nearly twice that of any other country. We pay enough for universal, top-notch care, but we're not receiving it.

Only a public plan can bring us free choice for all patients, universal coverage, and costs reduced to affordable, sustainable levels. President Obama had it right with his basic preference for a public, simplified, accountable, single-payer system. He guessed wrong when he thought that commercial insurance companies and pharmaceutical manufacturers would cooperate by substantially reducing their extraordinary profits. Instead, their representatives throw dishonest, fear-provoking charges against anything that threatens their grip. For Americans facing health system collapse, a public plan cannot be merely an "option." It's a necessity. President Obama should lead us out of the wilderness of wasteful, inefficient, private insurance.

No

Dr. M. Todd Williamson, president, Medical Association of Georgia

The Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) believes that the kind of "public" health insurance option that is proposed in H.R. 3200 will result in government-run health care. Given its enormous scale, the federal government would ultimately consume the marketplace for private insurance, Medicare, which was introduced as one health insurance option for seniors in 1965, illustrates this danger — having effectively evolved into the only health insurance option for seniors.

As the leading voice for physicians in Georgia, MAG agrees on the need to reform the country's health insurance and medical payment systems. But we believe that what's best for our patients is a health care system that is based on competition and free-market principles.

Americans will continue to enjoy the best medical care in the world as long as they are free to make their own decisions — consulting with their physician as a trusted adviser. MAG believes that individuals should own their health insurance, and they should be able to choose their physician. We are opposed to the "public option" because it is tantamount to having our patients relinquish those freedoms to cost savings-driven bureaucrats.

Compiled and edited by Tom Sabulis, tsabulis@ajc.com

