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Presidential Candidates Have Different Views, Approaches To Addressing Disparities in Cancer Care *New Survey Documents Their Priorities and Ideas*

April 3, 2008; Washington, DC -- With healthcare reform emerging as a defining issue for the 2008 Presidential race, the Intercultural Cancer Council Caucus (ICCC) today released new findings that reveal major differences in how the Presidential candidates would provide access to care for cancer patients, especially those currently without healthcare coverage.

Released in conjunction with the 11th Biennial Symposium on Minorities, the Medically Underserved, & Cancer sponsored by the Intercultural Cancer Council, the ICC's findings summarize the positions of Republican Senator John McCain, Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Democratic Senator Barack Obama regarding expanding healthcare coverage and addressing healthcare disparities in cancer care. The positions of the candidates are based on published analyses of their stated positions.

Looking specifically at the unmet need of providing access to care for those cancer patients who do not have private or government insurance, the two Democratic Presidential candidates offer similar plans for solving the problem. Specifically, Clinton proposes strengthening Medicaid and SCHIP to address holes in the safety net so vulnerable populations will have access to affordable, quality care. In comparison, Senator Obama is more specific by proposing that Americans who don't qualify for Medicare or SCHIP but still need financial assistance will be able to receive an income-related federal subsidy to buy into his new public plan or to purchase a private healthcare plan. Senator McCain has no specific plans for providing access to care for uninsured Americans but states the need to provide access to health care for all of our citizens.

Regarding universal health insurance, neither Democratic candidate proposes a single-payor system. Senator Clinton's *American Health Choices Plan* calls for allowing individuals to keep their current health insurance plan or to have access the same menu of private insurance options available to Members of Congress and their staff. Towards this end, the Clinton plan would provide tax relief; limit premium payments to a percentage of income; create a new small business tax credit; strengthen Medicaid and SCHIP; and launch a retiree health legacy initiative.

As part of the new health plan proposed by Senator Obama, individuals will be able to buy affordable health coverage similar to the plans available to federal employees if they don't have

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access to group coverage through their employer or to current public programs. Under Obama's plan, self-employed individuals and owners of small businesses will also be able to buy into this plan. In contrast, Senator McCain proposes making health insurance portable and providing \$2,500 in refundable tax credits for low-income individuals and \$5,000 to low-income families who obtain their own health insurance.

Regarding an important legislative priority for the cancer community -- eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care -- both Clinton and Obama offer proposals to improve the delivery of cancer care to minorities and the poor. Clinton's plan includes the development and testing of quality measures for use by doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and other providers targeted at eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare and specifically earmarks \$50 million in federal funding to develop culturally and linguistically competent clinical care programs for health professionals. Obama's plan focuses on eliminating inequities in healthcare by requiring hospitals and health plans to collect, analyze and report healthcare quality measures for underserved populations and by holding institutions to account for any differences found. Senator Obama's plan also calls for diversifying the workforce to ensure culturally effective care and the implementation and funding of evidence-based interventions.

Senator McCain, a cancer survivor, states the need for quality cancer care but offers no specific plans for addressing disparities in care among minorities and the medically underserved. He is on record as stating the need to protect the healthcare consumer through the enforcement of federal laws against collusion and unfair and deceptive business practices.

The ICCC also examined the candidates' views on several important issues for the cancer community, such as funding for behavior research and clinical trial participation among high cancer risk populations. On this matter, the priorities of the candidates are as follows:

- Clinton's plan would double the budget for the National Institutes of Health and the National Cancer Institute; expand the NCI Cancer Centers program, and increase by fivefold the number of patients participating in cancer clinical trials. Clinton's plan would also preserve Medicare coverage of clinical trials;
- Obama pledges to make eliminating cancer one of his top priorities and plans to increase funding for the NIH, NCI and for other medical research programs; and
- McCain proposes that federally sponsored research should focus on the care and cure of chronic disease and facilitate the development of national standards for measuring and recording treatments and outcomes.

On the issue of improved access to screening programs for the medically underserved, the candidates' approaches are also similar. Specifically:

- Senator Clinton would require all insurers participating in federal programs to cover prevention services. Her plan would also remove Medicare co-pays for colorectal and breast cancer screenings and fully fund the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.
- The Obama health plan would mandate coverage for screening programs in all federally supported health plans, including Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP and his new public plan;
- Senator McCain supports coverage of preventative services and would make patients the center of care and give them a larger role in both prevention and care.

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The ICCC also focused on the specific plans of the Presidential candidates to address obesity prevention as a public health goal. Here, the candidates focus specifically on addressing childhood obesity through these proposals:

- Senator Clinton's plan would increase funding for the Carol White Physical Education program by 50% (\$36 million) so schools will have the resources to offer PE and sports programs. The Clinton plan also advocates implementing a healthy schools program that would provide funding for schools that commit to replace unhealthy food in schools with healthy food by the year 2012;
- Senator Obama's plan supports fully funding SCHIP to ensure all children have access to the healthcare and preventive services they need. The Obama plan also states that schools and families need to get involved so children will learn healthy habits; and
- Senator McCain states that parents are responsible for insuring their children are taught about health, nutrition and exercise. He is also on record as stating that children should be provided with healthy dietary choices in schools.

The ICCC Presidential assessment is based on analyzing the stated positions of the three Presidential candidates on the basis of seven specific areas concerning specific policies and views on access to health care for the medically underserved and related to government cancer policies.

The Intercultural Cancer Council Caucus is an advocacy organization whose mission is to advance policies, programs, partnerships and research to eliminate the unequal burden of cancer among racial and ethnic minorities and medically underserved populations.

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