



Policy Statement on Health Care and Human Services

Dan Onorato believes that ensuring access to quality affordable health care must be a top priority for the next Governor. With experience running the state's second-largest county, Onorato understands how to deliver effective health care services in a fiscally responsible manner. And just as Pennsylvania's small businesses and working families have struggled with skyrocketing health care costs outside of their control, Onorato successfully held the line on property taxes even as his county's mandated health care costs nearly doubled.

Onorato will bring this commitment to health care and experience balancing the budget to the Governor's Office. Onorato will ensure that Pennsylvania's implementation of the new national health care reform law is pursued in the best interest of consumers and taxpayers. As Governor, Onorato will hew to the following principles in implementing the federal law:

- Pursuit of policy options that enhance affordability, access and quality care for all Pennsylvanians and that drive down costs;
- Dedication to increasing competition in order to maximize options for consumers and to save money for businesses;
- Full engagement of all major stakeholders and strong outreach to Pennsylvanians; and
- Transparent policy-making that puts a premium on efficiency and streamlining government.

The impact of the national health care reform law is only one part of the health and human services issues that face the next Governor. Onorato will also pursue policies that:

Enhance the state's ability to expand access, improve care and reduce unnecessary costs

- **Use adultBasic as a bridge until the federal health care provisions take effect.** Onorato will ensure that working adults who receive health care through the state's adultBasic insurance program retain access to their coverage until the full implementation of national health care reform.
- **Support the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council (PHC4).** The PHC4 was established in 1986 as an independent state office, and Onorato will continue the PHC4's operations to collect, analyze and make available to the public data about the cost and quality of health care in Pennsylvania.
- **Effectively and efficiently manage health and human services policy-making throughout state government.** Onorato will consult with a broad range of stakeholders on strategies to contain costs, improve service delivery and streamline government

operations. He will also ensure that the work of the Office of Health Care Reform remains a high priority.

- **Lead efforts to address chronic care challenges.** People with chronic illnesses represent a disproportionate share of the state's total health costs. Improving the quality of preventative and proactive care that chronically ill patients receive improves outcomes while driving down health care spending. Onorato will support the expansion of cost-effective strategies that improve treatment of chronic illnesses.
- **Support electronic medical records.** Onorato will ensure the successful implementation of the Pennsylvania Health Information Exchange through an inclusive process that includes medical professionals and experts in the field.
- **Encourage best practices in hospitals and nursing homes.** Onorato will support state policies and incentives that improve the quality of patient care and promote the efficient use of taxpayer resources.

Improve children's health and well-being

- **Ensure access to children's health services.** Onorato supports Pennsylvania's longstanding Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Onorato believes that every child in Pennsylvania should have health insurance and will pursue budgets that dedicate sufficient funding to make health care available through the state's "Cover All Kids" law. Onorato also recognizes the importance of maternal health and wellness services to children's well-being.
- **Fight the epidemic of childhood obesity.** To improve our children's health and to control future costs of health care, Onorato believes that we must tackle the epidemic of childhood obesity. Onorato will work to improve nutrition standards for the food served in school cafeterias and encourage schools to implement cost-effective strategies to serve a nutritious breakfast. He will also support efforts to increase physical education and that ensure that children have access to fresh locally grown produce at school.
- **Promote child welfare policies that work towards a safe and permanent family for all children.** Just as he has done as Allegheny County Executive, Onorato will prioritize child protection as Governor, including by establishing a children's ombudsperson in the child welfare system. Onorato also understands the importance of meeting the health care needs of children aging out of the foster care system or who are being reunited with their families.

Meet the long-term living needs of Pennsylvania residents

- **Support Pennsylvania's successful prescription drug program.** Onorato will ensure that the PACE and PACENET prescription drug programs continue to meet the needs of older adults on fixed incomes.
- **Rebalance the long-term living system.** Onorato knows that most Pennsylvanians who need long-term care services prefer to stay in their homes and communities – and that doing so is also the most cost-effective option for taxpayers. Onorato will ensure state support of home- and community-based care so that persons needing services can make the best choice for themselves and their family.
- **Assist persons with disabilities in fully participating in their communities.** As Governor, Onorato will consult with people with disabilities and ensure that state

programs effectively meet their needs. Onorato will also sustain the Governor’s Office of People with Disabilities.

- **Improve services for vulnerable adults with serious illnesses.** Onorato will pursue strategies that improve health and reduce hospitalizations for the group known as “dual eligibles” – those who are able to enroll in both Medicare and Medicaid.

Address health disparities

- **Provide state-level leadership in recognizing and addressing health disparities.** Onorato will support and expand the work of the Office of Health Disparities in the Department of Health.
- **Address minority health gaps.** Racial and ethnic minorities and members of the LGBT community are far more likely to face health problems in Pennsylvania due to a lack of preventative care, delayed detection, inadequate access to treatment and other barriers. Onorato will make addressing these health disparities a priority.
- **Improve women’s health.** Onorato will protect and expand state funding for low-income women to have mammograms and cervical cancer screenings. He also supports state funding for comprehensive family planning services.
- **Recognize the importance of addressing mental health needs.** Onorato believes that Pennsylvanians need access to mental health services on parity with physical health care. He will work to integrate mental health into coordinated care for patients, and he will ensure that the federal mental health parity law is fully carried out in Pennsylvania.

Meet the demand for a highly skilled health care workforce

- **Improve physician recruitment and retention.** Onorato believes that Pennsylvania must make physician attraction and retention a higher priority in order to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have access to health care professionals. There is more that can be done to improve the medical malpractice environment, and Onorato is committed to bringing together all stakeholder groups to find mutually agreeable solutions – including supporting the Mcare fund and restoring the Mcare abatement to encourage physicians to continue to practice in Pennsylvania. Onorato will also work with medical professionals to establish a loan forgiveness programs to help recruit and retain young physicians.
- **Address the shortage of nurses and other health care providers.** Onorato will emphasize a multi-pronged strategy that includes ensuring adequate capacity for education and training and addressing the needs of workers in the health fields, through the Center for Health Careers and other venues.
- **Ensure that the direct care workforce is prepared to meet projected needs.** Pennsylvanians with chronic conditions and physical disabilities deserve quality, reliable home care. Onorato supports the establishment of a Consumer Workforce Council, which will expand home care options for seniors and persons with disabilities while improving retention and skill levels for direct care workers. Onorato will also support resources for labor-management training partnerships.
- **Enable medical professionals to practice consistent with their level of training, experience and skill-set.** Onorato believes that reasonable scope of practice changes can benefit patients, physicians and other medical professionals; these proposals must be considered carefully to ensure that patient safety and quality of care are always paramount.