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## Senator Lisa Murkowski on Health Care

### *Summary*

Given our low population density and unique geography, Alaska's health care costs have traditionally been higher than the rest of the United States. Growing costs affect practitioners and recipients alike, preventing the delivery of health care services at an affordable price. These costs are only expected to increase without significant health care reform.

### *Health Care Reform . . .*

Lisa Murkowski **opposes the Democrats' version of health care reform** that was passed by the Congress because it will increase health care costs and insurance premiums, making it even more difficult for Alaskans to obtain access to health care and afford health care insurance.

The Democrats' health care bill will impose additional fees as a result of those higher costs. A study by Mark Foster, one of Alaska's leading health care analysts, found that under the law, premiums in Alaska would rise by 12 percent, a **net increase of about \$1,160 for some individuals and \$2,950 for some families**. Foster also predicts that roughly **50 percent of the health care plans in the state would be subject to a 40 percent excise tax** on high value insurance plans. In addition, the bill does nothing to fix the Medicare reimbursement rate for Alaska, which exacerbates the problem of access to a health care provider.

### *Lisa Murkowski supports health care reform that:*

- **Guarantees insurance coverage to those with pre-existing conditions** such as diabetes, heart disease or mental diseases, as well as for rare or genetic conditions;
- **Bans insurance companies from denying claims** or canceling coverage because of a newly detected health condition;
- **Ensures those who like their health coverage can keep it**, even if they move or switch jobs;
- **Guarantees important health care decisions are made by you and your doctor**, rather than federal bureaucrats.
- **Prevents insurance companies from placing financial limitations or caps** on how much they will pay for your treatment; and
- **Provides for medical liability reform** that will result in lower health care costs for doctors and patients alike.



### ***Reimbursement Rates . . .***

Lisa Murkowski notes that **one of the simplest ways to reduce health care costs is through preventative care that prevents chronic disease**. Type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease and stroke have the potential to be averted if preventative measures are taken.

To achieve this goal, patients must be able to **access a health care provider**, a task not always as simple as it should be given the high cost of providing health care services in Alaska. That is why Senators Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski **obtained a permanent 35 percent increase in the Medicare reimbursement rate for Alaska**.

As small business owners, practitioners must have some predictability to forecast overhead expenses, labor, rent, and malpractice costs. Constantly fluctuating Medicare reimbursement rates lead to instability within the health care community. That is why Lisa Murkowski is a co-sponsor of **legislation that would replace the Medicare reimbursement rate formula with an index that would keep reimbursements in line with practice costs**.

### ***Medical Malpractice . . .***

Lisa Murkowski supports Federal legislation to address medical malpractice non-economic damages, such as pain and suffering. In addition, she will work to **ensure that the State of Alaska be allowed to address and have flexibility on the issue of medical malpractice**.

### ***Lisa Murkowski Delivers on Health Care for Alaska:***

- Increased the Medicare reimbursement rate for Alaska by 35 percent – Passed 2008
- Providence Health System for physician recruitment and retention initiative - \$350,000 (2009)
- Anchorage Project Access -- \$125,000 for a program in which doctors donate their services to those most in financial need (2009)
- United Way of Anchorage -- \$100,000 to continue the Alaska 211 phone number that connects individuals with health and human resources 24 hours a day (2009)
- Obtained \$7.3 million in funding (2005, FY06 Agriculture Appropriations Bill) for the Mat-Su Valley Hospital Water-Sewer Line Grant to assist in building the necessary water and sewer lines for the new Mat-Su Valley Hospital and Medical Center. The hospital opened in 2007.
- Worked to make the VA Mat-Su Community Based Outpatient Clinic a reality (2008)
- City of Ketchikan -- \$1 million for facilities and equipment at Ketchikan General Hospital (2009)
- Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Consortium, Bethel -- \$1 million for facilities and equipment (2009)
- Co-sponsored and worked to improve the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to provide assistance to Native Alaskans (was finally included in Health Care bill which she opposed)
- Denali Commission Health Facilities - \$10 million (2009)

- Sexual Assault Response Team, Forensic Nursing - \$400,000 (2009, FY10 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Bill).
- Secured an amendment to the Tribal Law and Order Act to direct Congress's research agency to evaluate the resources of rural health clinics to collect forensic evidence.
- Authored and won passage Amchitka Nuclear Workers Compensation Aid and pushed for final regulations to expand and improve provisions of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Act for Alaskans affected by nuclear tests at Amchitka Island (2004).
- Secured an exemption from U.S. Department of Transportation rules to allow medical oxygen to be shipped to locations in the bush without being packed in enormous, blowtorch-proof boxes, which are impractical for transportation in rural Alaska.
- Won inclusion of amendments to the Indian Health Care Improvement Reauthorization and Extension Act to:
  - Enhance construction of sanitation facilities;
  - Authorize repayment of travel costs for family members who escort elders and young children to larger medical centers for emergency care;
  - Permanently authorized the Community Health Aide program to ensure basic medical care is available in remote villages;
  - Provided more comprehensive behavioral health services;
  - Authorized expansion of long-term care by HIS and tribally-operated hospitals including hospice care, assisted living, community based care, and elder home care.