

National Journal
Expert
Blogs

Health Care

Our panel of insiders discusses key issues

Monday, October 19, 2009

Defining Universal Coverage

How should Congress define universal coverage? The Senate Finance Committee bill is estimated to cover 94 percent of the population. Massachusetts has covered 97 percent of its population through its health reform, although it had a relatively low level of uninsured to begin with.

What is the best way to define universal coverage, and what are the most important factors that could keep the nation from getting there? How many of the uninsured should be covered under health reform?

-- Marilyn Werber Serafini, *NationalJournal.com*

SHARE 



Responded on October 21, 2009 11:13 AM

[Michael F. Cannon](#), Director of Health Policy Studies, Cato Institute

I cannot disagree with Uwe Reinhardt's [response](#) to me. But his response bears clarification and emphasis.

Improving "population health" generally means "helping people live longer."

To paraphrase, Uwe then writes:

If helping people live longer were our objective in health reform, we could do better than universal coverage. But health reform is not (solely or primarily) about helping people live longer. It is (also or primarily) about other things, like relieving the anxiety of the uninsured.

I applaud Uwe for acknowledging a reality that most advocates of universal coverage avoid: that universal coverage is not solely or primarily about improving health.

Will Uwe go farther and acknowledge that, since universal coverage is largely about some other X-factor (s), that *necessarily* means that advocates of universal coverage are willing to let some people die sooner in order to serve that X-factor?

More in Health Care [Go to section](#)

October 21, 2009 | Health Care Bulletin

[Need-To-Know Memo, Oct. 21](#)

October 21, 2009 | CongressDaily