



National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) Statement on Healthcare for All

February 20, 2008

The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) supports healthcare reform that will move our current system toward one that will improve the health, and well-being of all Latinas, their families and communities. NLIRH embraces a human rights approach to health care, ensuring that all health services are accessible, available, affordable, and of good quality for everyone.¹ These services should be provided on an equitable basis, free from discrimination or coercion. Healthcare reform can take many paths, and it is important that the needs of all Latinas, including immigrant women, women of color and low-income women are front and center.

NLIRH supports a system that includes all people, regardless of income, immigration status, or any other limiting factor. The current healthcare system leaves many Latinas falling through the cracks; 38% of Latinas are uninsured, the highest rate amongst all groups of women.² Some Latinas may have an income too high to qualify for Medicaid, yet too low to afford private insurance. Many Latinas who would qualify based on income are not eligible. Among the ineligible are undocumented Latinas and legal permanent residents who have been in the United States for less than five years. This lack of access to healthcare contributes heavily to the health disparities that Latinas face, in turn affecting many other aspects of Latinas' quality of life.

It is important that such a system includes a full and comprehensive range of services, including coverage for family planning, abortions, prenatal care and preventive services. Currently Latinas – especially low-income, uninsured and immigrant Latinas – face numerous obstacles to obtaining these services, including cost and lack of access. Under the Hyde Amendment, no federal funds can be used for abortion services³, meaning that many women on Medicaid are unable to access a full range of options when facing an unintended pregnancy, and may turn to unsafe terminations if they do not wish to carry the pregnancy to term. This and other obstacles create a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality on Latinas.

Moreover, NLIRH supports a system that is not only inclusive of all people and offers a comprehensive range of services, but is also one that emphasizes culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services. Comprehensive care is meaningless unless it is provided in a language with which patients are comfortable and accompanied by physicians and other clinicians that understand the needs of Latinas, immigrant women, and low-income women. Unless Latinas feel free of judgment, coercion and discrimination at our doctors' offices, health disparities will continue regardless of availability and access. Supporting health care reform that incorporates a human rights framework would ensure a holistic approach to the care needed for all Latinas to advance *salud, dignidad y justicia!*

¹ Principles adapted from “Human Rights Principles for Health Care in the United States”, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) and National Health Law Program (NHeLP), January 2008

² According to the 2004 Kaiser Women’s Health Survey. Kaiser Family Foundation.

³ Except in the case of rape, incest or life endangerment