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REPORT EXAMINES PRIMARY CARE SOLUTION TO TEXAS' BROKEN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

AUSTIN – Texas' health care system is plagued by ever-rising costs, poor quality, inadequate management of care, and a shrinking primary care workforce. These problems are made worse by a system that has not embraced technological advancements that could improve patient care while reducing unnecessary administrative expenses, medical errors and costly duplication of services. This inefficient and fragmented system poses a critical threat to the state's economic health and well-being, according to a report released this week by the Primary Care Coalition.

“The Primary Solution: Mending Texas' Fractured Health Care System” outlines the impending crisis and details the possible benefits the state could realize by investing in primary care.

“We've got a fractured health care system that doesn't support cost-effective, coordinated, high-quality care for patients,” said Robert Youens, M.D., of Weimar, president of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians. “Our elected leaders must take immediate, bold steps to mend our broken health care system to ensure our patients receive the right care at the right time in the right setting.”

The outlook for Texas is grim. According to the report:

- Health care costs continue to grow at an unsustainable rate, putting needed care out of reach for many Texans.
- Increases in insurance premiums drive a growing percentage of employers to shift health care costs to their employees, to limit options or to stop providing health insurance altogether. Yet the insurance market fails to provide accessible or affordable coverage for those in need.
- Texas currently faces a severe shortage of primary care physicians, which will only worsen as the population swells in coming years.
- Patients are forced to navigate an exceedingly complex system with little or no guidance. The lack of communication and coordination of the care they receive results in increased hospitalizations, poor-quality care and escalating expense.
- The absence of quality-improvement programs and adoption of clinical health information technology systems leads to poor overall quality of care.

“Poorly managed chronic diseases, increased emergency room and hospital admissions and unnecessary tests and services are major causes for sky-rocketing health costs,” said Robert Jackson, M.D., president of the Texas Chapter of the American College of Physicians. “A primary care medical home offers a solution to these problems. The medical literature is replete with evidence that clearly affirms that patients with ready access to primary care receive higher quality care with better health outcomes for less cost.”

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By reforming our private health insurance market to ensure patients have access to affordable and accessible health insurance options, by strengthening Medicaid and CHIP, by growing our primary care physician workforce and by investing in health information technology, the Texas Legislature can lay the foundation of a health care system that will benefit generations of Texans to come while reining in unsustainable health care costs.

“By strengthening our primary care infrastructure, the Texas Legislature has within its means the ability to cure the disease that is plaguing our health care system,” said Jane Rider, M.D., a pediatrician in San Angelo who serves as chair of the Primary Care Coalition. “The consequences of reduced access to primary care are clear – chronic disease will go unmanaged, patients won’t stop getting sick, but unable to access preventive and primary care services, they will seek more costly care in our overcrowded hospital emergency rooms, and health care costs will continue to increase.”

The Primary Care Coalition, comprised of almost 15,000 physicians from the Texas Academy of Family Physicians, the Texas Chapter of the American College of Physicians and the Texas Pediatric Society, has called upon lawmakers to close ranks and forge bipartisan solutions to address these dangerous trends and improve our health care delivery system during the upcoming session of the Texas Legislature.

To access the report, “The Primary Solution: Mending Texas’ Fractured Health Care System,” go to <http://www.tafp.org/advocacy/primarySolution.pdf>.

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