



## ILLINOIS MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH COALITION

1256 West Chicago Avenue ♦ Chicago, Illinois 60622

Tel: (312) 491-8161 ♦ Fax: (312) 491-8171 ♦

Email: [ilmaternal@ilmaternal.org](mailto:ilmaternal@ilmaternal.org)

Website: [www.ilmaternal.org](http://www.ilmaternal.org)

---

Testimony to Chicago City Council  
Subcommittees on Health and Human Relations  
June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
From Robyn Gabel, Executive Director

Good afternoon, my name is Robyn Gabel and I am the Executive Director of the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition. The Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition has a 20 year history of expanding access to health coverage, promoting effective health care delivery models, reducing service disparities and encouraging quality improvement in pivotal policy areas to improve the overall health and well-being of women, children and families in Chicago and throughout the state of Illinois.

The Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition has contributed to and advocated for a number of policies and program changes that allow for more children and their families to gain access to affordable health insurance and health care services. Yet, despite our best efforts, we have been unable to fight off skyrocketing health care costs, company downsizing, as well as reductions in employer benefit contributions that has led to the over 1.8 million individuals in Illinois who are uninsured.

We know that the working poor, minorities and women, disproportionately feel the effects of being uninsured. Uninsured women, especially women of color, are more likely to be diagnosed with advance stage breast cancer than women with private insurance.

Uninsured adults are over three times more likely to delay care than their insured counterparts. This often results in easily treatable diseases progressing into advanced chronic conditions and costly emergency room visits.

According to a study by national health advocates, Families USA, health insurance premiums for an Illinois family in 2005 were \$1,059 higher due to the unpaid costs of health care for the uninsured. By 2010, this number is estimated to be over \$1,500. For working-class, middle income families, this money could be used instead for college tuition, mortgage payments or retirement savings.

Additionally, a study by Harvard Law School found that about half of all families filing for bankruptcy do so in the aftermath of a serious medical problem; since 2000, this has included over five million families. How many of these families reside in the City of Chicago?

Yet, the financial burden is not the most compelling reason that we should take immediate action to solve our health care crisis. The cost to society can also be counted in the number of people who are unable to get preventative treatment, medically necessary screenings and live-saving medications; some of these individuals, as a result, die early.

The Institute of Medicine, released a report in 2002 that estimated that 18,000 adults between the ages of 24 and 64 died in 2000 because they did not have health insurance. In 2006, these estimates grew to 22,000 individuals, which is twice as many people who die from homicide each year in the United

States. And for those persons between 55 and 64 years of age, being uninsured ranks as the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer.

Illinois-specific data estimated that over 6,000 adults in this age group died from being uninsured from 2000 – 2006, about 18 people a week. How many of these individuals are residents of Chicago? No matter how many or how few, we can no longer stand on the sidelines and allow this horrible injustice to continue.

I urge the City of Chicago to support programs and policies that move Chicago and the state of Illinois towards providing affordable, accessible, high-quality health coverage for all. Several proposals have been put forth by members of the Illinois General Assembly, but some legislators continue to stand in the way of comprehensive health care reform. City Council members are in a unique position to urge their respective State Senators and Representatives to take action on these health care initiatives. We cannot allow this health care crisis continue to physically, financially and emotionally devastate individuals, families and our community. Thank you.

---

*Executive Director Biography*

**ROBYN GABEL, B.A., M.S.P.H., M.J.**

Ms. Gabel has been the Executive Director of the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition since 1988. Ms. Gabel has combined a career in the health field and politics for twenty-five years. Since coming to the Coalition, Ms. Gabel has led the organization in advocacy and education efforts to increase immunization rates of three year olds, reduce the transmission of HIV from mother to newborn by two-thirds, expand the number of school health centers, and enroll children in AllKids, the state's child health insurance program.

**Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition (IMCHC)**

[www.ilmaternal.org](http://www.ilmaternal.org)

Recognizing that healthy infants, children, mothers and families constitute the basis of our society, IMCHC is dedicated to promoting and improving the health and well-being of women and children in Illinois through advocacy, education, community empowerment and policy development. The activities of the Coalition address and support the fundamental principles of equity, social justice and fair access to care, which are basic rights of all human beings. The Coalition's main objectives are directed to overcome critical barriers, such as poverty and racism, that prevent achievement of maternal and child wellness.

*IMCHC's Our Projects*

**Campaign to Save Our Babies** aims at reducing racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality in Illinois over 10 years and completely eliminating them over 25 years.

**Chicago Area Immunization Campaign** is a diverse community-focused coalition working to increase childhood and adult immunization rates by providing parents and seniors the education, information, and resources to aid their access to timely immunizations.

**Closing the Gap** aims to examine, promote and address reproductive health issues along a continuum – preconceptionally, prenatally, and postpartum.

**Consumer Voices for Coverage** is a state-based consumer health advocacy initiative supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Our project works with the Campaign for Better Health Care to strengthen and raise Illinois consumer voices in several Chicago and North suburban Congressional Districts to promote sound health care policies and expand coverage in the state.

**Illinois Coalition for School Health Centers** works statewide to improve the physical and mental health status of children and adolescents by advocating for the development, expansion, and sustainability of school health centers. The Coalition also provides support to professionals in the school based health care field.