



## 2011 Policy Priorities

*Georgians for a Healthy Future is a non-profit, non-partisan health policy and advocacy organization that addresses health care issues through a consumer lens. Our 2011 policy priorities were developed with broad input from community stakeholders. We will work collaboratively with our community partners to advance these priorities.*

### **Support Consumer-Friendly Implementation of the Affordable Care Act:**

Several elements of the nation's new health care law, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), will be implemented at the state level. Georgians for a Healthy Future will monitor legislation and agency-level activity to implement the new law and will support Georgia laws and regulations that establish systems and procedures to maximize benefits for Georgia's health care consumers. In particular, the implementation process should take into account the needs of vulnerable populations who will become newly eligible for Medicaid or private, subsidized health insurance through the insurance exchange. Georgians for a Healthy Future will also support legislation to establish a commission or task force to oversee and coordinate implementation activity in a systematic and transparent fashion.

### **Protect and Strengthen Access to Quality Care for Medicaid and PeachCare Beneficiaries:**

The Medicaid and PeachCare programs provide health insurance for our state's most vulnerable citizens. Georgians for a Healthy Future will support policies to improve these programs in ways that facilitate continuous coverage and simplify enrollment procedures for families. Per federal law, current eligibility levels for these programs must be maintained; however, other efforts to reduce expenditures within these programs that could have a deleterious impact on access to care, such as provider rate cuts or the movement of the aged, blind, and disabled population into care management organizations, may be introduced. Georgians for a Healthy Future will oppose changes to these programs that could negatively impact access to vital health care services for Medicaid and PeachCare beneficiaries.

### **Preserve Consumer Protections for Georgians in Private Health Insurance Plans:**

In recent years, legislation has been proposed to eliminate or circumvent consumer protections in private health insurance plans. For example, in 2010 there was a proposal to allow out-of-state insurers to sell health insurance to Georgia consumers without having to comply with the insurance benefits and consumer protections that Georgia plans must include, as delineated under Georgia law. These protections ensure that consumers purchasing private plans are buying meaningful health insurance that covers essential medical services in the event they get sick. Georgians for a Healthy Future will monitor and oppose legislation that would place consumer protections at risk.

### **Strengthen Georgia's Public Health System:**

Our public health system plays a critical role in Georgia by vaccinating children, monitoring and preventing epidemics, ensuring safe food and water, and providing basic preventive services. Despite a growing need for services, however, Georgia's public health spending, on a per capita basis, is among the lowest in the nation. This has placed a significant strain on the existing system. Georgians for a Healthy Future opposes further reductions to public health programs and supports a stronger, adequately funded public health system. Georgians for a Healthy Future will also support a structure for the Division of Public Health that provides the Division with the autonomy, authority, and resources to revitalize Georgia's public health system.

### **Support a More Sustainable Revenue Structure, Including an Increase in the Tobacco Tax:**

Investment in a strong health system in Georgia will yield long-term benefits in the health and health outcomes of Georgia patients and consumers. However, in recent years, even the most basic, vital, and cost-effective programs have been subject to deep budget cuts. Georgians for a Healthy Future opposes further cuts to these vital programs and supports budget solutions such as a substantial increase in the state's tobacco tax, which has the dual benefit of bringing in additional revenue to the state and increasing the health of Georgians by curbing youth smoking rates.