



Brittany Williams
Washington, District of Columbia
Winner – 2007 Vera Yip Scholarship
Essay

The Commonwealth Fund (www.cmwf.org) recently released a report documenting the lack of health insurance coverage in the young adult population. This issue is of particular relevance to young adults impacted by cancer. For example, if you have cancer yourself, you may not have access to medical care because of no or low quality medical coverage. If you are the child of a parent with cancer, you may want to get regular screenings or genetic testing because of the type of cancer your parent had.

Think about how this issue relates to your personal experience with cancer. Now think about how you will convince one of the candidates running for President in 2008 to make health insurance for young adults a priority. You may want to learn how your state/community is dealing with this challenge. Please frame your response in the form of a letter to a potential candidate and explain how you would use your experience with cancer to persuade him/her.

Dear Presidential Candidate,

Cancer invades millions of American lives each year. I know this because nine months ago my family received the devastating news that my father, like many other American men, had prostate cancer. Thankfully he had access to excellent health care and underwent advanced surgical treatment less than two months after his diagnosis, and has subsequently entered remission. Our family's story is one of triumph, but there are others who do not have high quality health care coverage, and therefore face a much bleaker future.

My father's close relationship to his doctors facilitated his diagnosis and treatment. Annual doctor visits were routine in our household because, through medical insurance, we had access to quality doctors with low out-of-pocket costs. My father was determined to be at high risk for prostate cancer after his father's diagnosis with the disease. At the age of 45, my father began receiving pre-screening treatment every six months. These preventative measures were encouraged and covered by his insurance policy. As a result of one such screening, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer at age 52. His diagnosis came at a very difficult time for our family, but we were able to hold strong because the cancer was detected before it had spread and was still operable. Six weeks later he had surgery to remove his prostate. Our family would not have been able to afford the necessary surgery and doctors' visits were it not for coverage offered through our medical insurance. Two months post-operation, my father was cancer free and slowly but surely moving towards recovery. Although our family, like everyone impacted by cancer, faced financial, emotional, and physical hardship, the support offered by insurance was our safety net.

Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the life-saving medicine that saved my father's life lies out of reach for many U.S. citizens. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), one in two American men and one in three American women will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetimes; cancer claims one of every four American deaths. Effective pre-screening measures and treatment of cancer could greatly reduce its impact on our society. However, many of those at risk will not receive necessary medical care. My father's survival has empowered and driven me to advocate for the marginalized members of our society who are more likely to be affected by cancer and less likely to have access to America's life-saving medical facilities.

Ulman Cancer Fund 2007 Scholarship Winner
Brittany Williams
Essay

Cancer disproportionately impacts low socio-economic classes and racial minorities in the U.S., the same people who are predisposed to receive substandard healthcare. The medical community recommends regular annual or bi-annual visits to physicians and dentists for all citizens. These annual visits not only educate Americans on proper healthcare techniques and build a solid relationship with medical service providers, but also greatly increase the possibility of early cancer detection, which according to the Commonwealth Fund has been proven to increase the survival rate of those effected with some of the most frequently occurring cancers. Without access to routine medical care, the chances of early detection are greatly diminished and survival rates spiral downwards.

Routine medical coverage becomes inaccessible as young adults reach independence at age 19. At a time when they should be taking ownership of their health and well being, many young adults age 19-29 will be excluded from the system. With 13.7 million young adults currently uninsured, the Commonwealth Fund claims this is "one of the fastest-growing segments of the populations without health insurance in the United States." Once 19 years old, millions of young adults lose eligibility for Medicaid and state health programs, are kicked off their parents' private insurance plan, and are not guaranteed coverage through their university. These same young adults are unable to purchase these services on their own because of their high cost. Due to poor public health care coverage for this age bracket, young adults from low-income families are more likely to end up without insurance, negatively impacting their own health as well as increasing the future cost to society of later medical intervention. As the Commonwealth Fund articulates, "going without insurance disrupts [young adult's] access to the health care system, introduces barriers to care when it is needed, and leaves young adults and their families at risk for high out-of-pocket costs in the event of a severe illness or injury." At the age of 19, a large portion of our society loses its relationship with healthcare providers and is forced into an indefinite period of vulnerability. Those who become estranged from the medical system at this point in their lives are less likely to receive routine care, precluding them from receiving preventative measures against cancer.

Although I have traveled extensively in Africa during the past three years and seen some of the most critical healthcare crises in the world, I struggle more to comprehend how, in this nation of such wealth and prosperity, millions of young adults are unable to access healthcare. The lack of adequate health services for nearly 14 million members of my generation means in the future they will suffer unnecessarily from preventable illnesses. Poor public policies currently in place are exacerbating this situation. As serious of a threat as cancer poses both in terms of human capital and monetary cost to society, mitigating its impact should be a top issue on your agenda. As a Presidential hopeful, you have power at your fingertips to change the reality young adults are facing, to develop more comprehensive healthcare policies, and to protect millions of young Americans.

**Ulman Cancer Fund 2007 Scholarship Winner
Brittany Williams
Essay**

Our family's battle with cancer has made me more aware of the blessing of reliable medical coverage. Our nation has limitless resources, and I hope that with your time in office you will use some of these to ensure access to healthcare for my generation. It is time to make public policy changes that extend medical coverage to those most in need. A healthy generation of young Americans means a brighter future for us all.

Sincerely,

Brittany Williams