

## **I. HEALTH CARE**

### **A. Guaranteed Health Care & Patient's Rights**

**WHEREAS**, health care is a basic human need and a right that everyone is entitled to receive, regardless of ability to pay; and

**WHEREAS**, it is a disgrace that the United States is the only industrialized country in the world which doesn't provide comprehensive health care to all residents and visitors with funding equity gaps in mental health services, patient counseling services, alcohol and chemical dependency treatment services among other critical services needed; and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. spends a higher portion of its gross domestic product on health care than any country, a World Health Organization study (in 2000) ranked our health system a shameful 37 out of 191 countries and revealed it ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in longevity and 18<sup>th</sup> in infant mortality; and

**WHEREAS**, 46 million Americans have no health care insurance at all and 42 million or more are significantly underinsured; and

**WHEREAS**, the American health care system is in crisis, and with the most advanced health care technology in the world, only a few can afford it; and

**WHEREAS**, the current U.S. health care system is excessively costly because it does not make preventative care a priority, treats symptoms instead of the whole person, uses disjointed and antiquated information systems and fails to eliminate excess profits and administrative waste; and

**WHEREAS**, the private insurance industry fails to provide affordable, adequate coverage, while profiteering to its own advantage and state initiatives for "universal healthcare" through private insurance companies have proven unsuccessful.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports a single payer, nonprofit, publicly-funded and universal health care system that covers all health care needs, including preventative care, dental care, mental health, alcohol/chemical dependency services, patient counseling, prescription drugs, and long-term care, as examples; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers' Networks in each state pursue the development of a single-payer system in each state, as well as working for passage of national single payer legislation; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers calls on all civic organizations, communities of faith, health care providers and institutions in America to collaborate for a universal health care system that guarantees comprehensive, quality, affordable health care for every person in the United States; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports a Patients' Bill of Rights at the state and federal levels.

## **B. Reproductive Choice**

**WHEREAS**, women of all ages, together with their health care providers, should have the right to make decisions about their own bodies; and

**WHEREAS**, access to reproductive health care, including contraception and pre-natal care, is limited for low-income women all over the world.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports funding for all aspects of family planning nationally and internationally.

## **C. Medical Marijuana**

**WHEREAS**, several states have passed laws that legalize cannabis for medical purposes; and

**WHEREAS**, while the federal government vehemently opposes the concept of using cannabis for medical purposes, it acknowledges the positive effects of its use for medicinal purposes.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports legalizing medical marijuana, federally and locally.

## **D. Funding for Stem Cell Medical Research**

**WHEREAS**, Congress authorizes and funds research on various diseases and health problems, and for therapies to eliminate or to mitigate those conditions; and

**WHEREAS**, recent studies demonstrate that stem cell research is likely to lead to new means to fight disease, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease, diabetes, metabolic disorders and more; and

**WHEREAS**, limitations on stem cell research have been based on political rather than scientific concerns.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers urges Congress to remove legal and policy barriers to stem cell research; and

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that patents, benefits of research and direction of research should remain under public/consumer supervision and shall accrue to the benefit of the consumer/public.

## **E. Repeal the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act**

**WHEREAS**, the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) contained the Medicare Part D Drug Plan that has upset, confused, and even endangered the health of seniors and disabled people, disrupting their access to medicines, making them buy drugs from private companies with restricted formularies and inadequate or confusing information, and making the poorest pay more than before, while drug companies get \$139 billion in additional profits; and

**WHEREAS**, the MMA is a plan to first entice and later coerce healthier Medicare recipients out of traditional fee-for-service Medicare and into private plans like HMOs, PPOs and private FFS plans, which will profit since their patients will need little care. Traditional Medicare would be left with the sickest, most expensive patients, and would have reduced funding because of fewer patients and stringent new cost controls; and

**WHEREAS**, the MMA is a plan to encourage higher income seniors to leave Medicare, both by charging higher premiums if they stay, and by giving tax reductions if they leave to set up Health Savings Accounts. Converting Medicare into a program for low-income seniors will make it politically vulnerable to further cuts; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2010, the Act calls for suspending Medicare coverage in ten test areas, and forces people in those areas to accept vouchers to purchase either private coverage (through a Medicare Advantage Plan which is marketed to healthier people) or traditional Medicare (which must accept sicker, more expensive patients.)

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Gray Panthers advance the position that the entire 2003 Medicare Modernization Act must be repealed, and that this position be emphasized whenever we discuss Medicare in our national or local groupings; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers advance the position that the way to solve Medicare's problems, and the healthcare problems of the nation, is not to restrict Medicare, but to improve its benefits, including a drug program under Medicare without gaps, based on fair and affordable prices; and extend them to everyone in the United States; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that until affordable prescription drugs are available to people in the United States, that there be no constraint on governments from negotiating for lower prices or purchasing lower cost prescriptions from other countries.

## **F. Pharmaceutical Patents**

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Pharmaceutical Industry has accumulated immense wealth and with it, political power; and

**WHEREAS**, the industry clearly influences the direction and outcome of government funded research, effectively compromising public mechanisms which are intended to ensure safety and to direct public resources to high priority problems; and

**WHEREAS**, the Pharmaceutical Industry benefits from the basic medical research performed under government auspices and with public funds; and

**WHEREAS**, the Pharmaceutical Industry's use of the patent system effectively converts the results of publicly funded research, a "public good", into private property for the economic benefit of members of the industry; and

**WHEREAS**, the industry uses its power to protect inflated prices and to engorge its profits.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, Gray Panthers calls for laws and policies through which the National Institutes of Health and related public health institutions will retain an economic share in the patent rights associated with the research that they sponsor; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the proceeds from the share in patents be kept out of the general fund and returned to NIH and related agencies to further health research, especially for orphan drugs, in addition to funds appropriated for this purpose.

## **G. Community Support for Seniors & People with Disabilities**

**WHEREAS**, millions of seniors and people with disabilities currently need or will need long-term services (including mental health and addiction services), and supports to live in the community; and

**WHEREAS**, the current long-term care system is fragmented, overly medicalized, bureaucratic, expensive, and laden with an institutional bias that unnecessarily places seniors and people with disabilities in nursing homes and other institutions, and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1998[Olmstead] that people have the right to services in the least restrictive setting; and

**WHEREAS**, Federal and State governments push for block grants to limit spending on Medicaid services; and

**WHEREAS**, Americans overwhelmingly want long-term care services and supports in their own homes and communities; and

**WHEREAS**, the reform of the long-term care system must be a cooperative partnership with the federal government, the states and the disabled & senior communities.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the long-term services and support system must place priority on home and community-based services, and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that these services be provided through a coordinated system that adequately involves payers, such as Medicare and other insurers, health care providers, state and local government agencies, and community based services, as well as

people with disabilities and older people who do or will receive these services, in the design, implementation and review of any such system; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers will work with states and other system participants to insure the implementation of the Supreme Court's decision, so as to include documentation of results, including appropriate analyses of the numbers of persons diverted from nursing homes and other institutions, client and family satisfaction with services as provided by the system, and other matters related to the efficacy of this approach; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers will aggressively oppose attempts to “block grant” or privatize in any way the current national Medicaid protections.