

SINGLE PAYER IN COLORADO

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Colorado activists have worked to bring about single-payer health care for many years, initially through national groups such as the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) and Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP). Both of these groups called for the single-payer approach to health care financing at the national level. In 1993, local activists from these groups as well as union members and other people came together at the YMCA of the Rockies Center in Estes Park and created the Colorado Coalition for Single Payer (CCSP). This grassroots group, initially led by Dr. Rick Bieser, actively campaigned along the Front Range for single payer for about six years. CCSP held programs and conducted debates, wrote letters to the editor and guest opinion pieces, met with legislators, had booths at numerous community events, and even had a short monthly radio program on KGNU for several years as well as an hour-long special based on interviews of Canadian health care officials that Mary and Ray Sell conducted. Eventually energy waned and CCSP gave way to a Boulder-based group, Health Policy Watch (HPW) in 1998. HPW's goal was less ambitious, primarily to provide information to the public. A few of HPW's articles are still available at <http://bcn.boulder.co.us/health/healthwatch/hpwinindex.html>.

The Gray Panthers in Denver, under the leadership of Bob Danknich and with the support of Marge Lueders, next took the lead on the single-payer issue in 1999. The Gray Panthers created a single-payer initiative for the ballot, possibly for 2001 or 2002. In addition, to build support for the initiative, Ron Forthofer and Bob Danknich performed an analysis of the financial data from Colorado's healthcare system. However the Panthers reluctantly decided that it didn't have sufficient resources to get the initiative on the ballot at that time. Therefore some of the Gray Panthers in Denver, particularly Bob Danknich and Norin Elfton, along with activists from CCSP and HPW – Bruce Robinson, Mary and Ray Sell and Ron Forthofer – then formed a new group called Health Care for All Colorado (HCAC) in 2001. HCAC's mission was to inform and educate people in Colorado about the single-payer approach as well as to work for the adoption of single-payer financing/administration of health care at the state and national levels.

HCAC hit the ground running and quickly created informational brochures in English and Spanish, a web site, and material to be used in presentations. HCAC conducted training for speakers, did a number of presentations to groups, and surveyed political candidates on health care. HCAC's first chapter was in Boulder and HCAC quickly developed a Denver chapter. Within its first two years, HCAC attracted a number of key people including Dr. Howie Wolf, John Valvano, Dr. Elinor Christiansen, Amy Truby, Ron Gould, Terry Fedak and Michele Swensen who played important roles in solidifying the organization. Since these early days, HCAC has grown in membership and influence in Colorado. The organization has been fortunate to have lots of wonderful new volunteers stepping forward to take leadership positions in expanding the influence of HCAC.