

I believe a publicly funded, single payer system would best address the many problems plaguing health care here in Maine and throughout the United States. I expressed some of my views in the following letter to the editor, written in response to an op-ed on funding disparities and inequities in community hospitals.

Stephen Murphy's opinion piece in the August 25 *Maine Sunday Telegram* describes well the problems plaguing community hospitals, especially those in rural areas.

A single payer healthcare system would alleviate many of these problems. In a single payer system, hospitals would negotiate with the government annual or biennial global budgets that would cover all hospital expenses over a given time. These budgets would provide stable funding and reflect actual costs of running a hospital, taking into account its historical expenses and its projected needs, including optimal staffing.

Global budgeting would eliminate administrative costs associated with claims and billing, end the problem of uncompensated care, and eradicate inequities in reimbursement among Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, and self-pay patients.

Murphy gives special attention to many problems associated with Medicare Advantage plans administered by private insurance companies. In a single payer system, there would be no Medicare Advantage plans.

Everyone realizes our health care system is broken. Its problems are legion. Beyond those outlined in Murphy's piece, there are, to name a few, provider shortages that lead to long waits for care; insurance plans with such high deductibles that people end up paying for all their care out of pocket; and mountains of medical debt (the number one cause of bankruptcy in America).

We remain the only developed nation without some form of universal health care. There are a number of ways to achieve this, but a single payer system would be the simplest, least expensive and fairest system for patients, providers, and hospitals.