

Office of Affordable Healthcare Public Hearing
September 25, 2024

Thank you so much for the opportunity to discuss healthcare affordability in Maine.

I am a Family Physician in Maine and have experience working with many patients who face financial barriers to accessing healthcare.

This spring, I spoke with a group of Community Health Workers at Maine Access Immigrant Network about colorectal cancer screening and how they can help their communities access this important service. Focused on the background of why we do colon cancer screening and how it is performed, I naively did not expect the conversation to shift to cost. I found myself in the position of strongly recommending a test that, for underinsured New Mainers, may be prohibitively expensive. Even for those with insurance, the fear of being billed for a colonoscopy was much more of a barrier than the thought of doing the prep and undergoing the procedure. Despite being a top recommendation from National organizations, I found my ringing endorsement of colon cancer screening was overshadowed by financial fears.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 62% of adults in the United States have forgone or delayed medical care due to cost.¹ That number is even higher for patients with cancer, for which treatment is notoriously expensive.¹ Even with insurance, high deductibles and out-of-pocket costs make necessary healthcare unattainable for many. This is antithetical to the reason many medical providers entered the field: to take care of patients in need. What is the value of our cutting-edge medical technology and state-of-the-art facilities if more than half of Americans cannot access them?

I strongly support the statement put forth by the Maine Medical Association in 2023 regarding healthcare reform.² The staggering health inequities in the U.S. will not abate until costs are reigned in and patients are prioritized over profits. Thank you very much for your time and your work on this important issue.

Dr. Emily Follo, MD, MPH
Member of Healthcare Advocates for Maine

1. Levey NN. In America, cancer patients endure debt on top of disease. Kaiser Family Foundation. Published July 9, 2022. Accessed September 25, 2024.
<https://kffhealthnews.org/news/article/in-america-cancer-patients-endure-debt-on-top-of-disease/>

2. Maine Medical Association. Maine Medical Association statement on reform of the U.S. health care system. Approved June 7, 2023. Accessed September 25, 2024.
https://www.mainemed.com/sites/default/files/content/statement_hcr_mma_board_adop ted_6_7_23_FINAL.pdf