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*All In . . . We Win!*

## An Idea Whose Time Has Come

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At a time when our nation seems to be focused almost entirely on the many issues that divide us, there is one critically important aspect of our lives that has the power to unite us—if we will let it. That is our health.

No matter who we are or what we believe, we all inhabit human bodies made up of the same 650 muscles, 206 bones and 78 organs, all of which are susceptible to over 20,000 diseases and countless other maladies and misfortunes.

And when the need arises, we all rely on the same healthcare system to provide accessible, quality care—and do so without causing irreparable harm to our family finances.

That means we all have a very big problem—and a very big opportunity.

The problem is that our healthcare system is in crisis. It is now more inefficient and expensive than ever. In 2015, for the first time, our per capita spending on healthcare exceeded \$10,000. We outspend every other nation by a huge margin, yet we rank 38<sup>th</sup> in the world in life expectancy—right behind Cuba. We aren't getting much bang for our healthcare buck.

Here's the opportunity. This crisis will only be fixed by those who have the most to lose if it isn't—the American healthcare consumer.

Like the mood of our country, the national debate about how to provide and pay for healthcare in America is more combative and polarized than ever and gives every indication that it is now driven more by bad politics than good policy.

We need to counter this negative and divisive national debate with positive, unifying, local conversations designed to create the collective belief that we all can, should, and must begin to take personal responsibility for our own health and that of our families.

Keeping politics out of these conversations won't be easy, yet it's essential.

*All In . . . We Win! (AIWW)* is a voluntary and non-partisan consumer-driven movement to improve individual health outcomes, reduce the incidence of preventable chronic illness, begin to contain overall healthcare costs, and empower the healthcare consumer.

Here's why it works. The politicians and policy-makers who control the national healthcare debate consistently attribute our escalating healthcare costs to a combination of the following: an aging population, more expensive medical procedures, the Affordable Care Act, waste, fraud, corporate greed, burdensome regulations, our litigious society, and the inefficiencies of a fragmented financing and delivery system.

While all are contributors, what's really driving the healthcare crisis is an issue that few of those same politicians and policy-makers care to address: the declining collective health status of our citizenry. Consider these facts:

- Almost 90 percent of health insurance claims are the direct or indirect result of our daily lifestyle choices.
- As much as 60 percent of the \$3.2 trillion (or more) we'll spend on healthcare this year will be used to treat illnesses caused by three preventable behaviors: smoking, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity.

***This means that where both our individual health and the sustainability of our healthcare system are concerned, we consumers literally control our own destiny.***

Most of us understand that tangible benefits (physical, emotional, and financial) are realized when individuals begin to take responsibility for their own health.

Less understood are the multiple benefits that would accrue to all of us if enough individuals, acting concurrently, and in their own best interest, began to make even modest improvements in their daily life-style choices. As health outcomes improve, the incidence of preventable (and expensive to treat) chronic illness would decline. This would relieve inflationary pressure on the overall cost of care—making it more affordable for all of us.

This isn't just theory. Research reported by Gallup concluded that an average population-wide weight loss of only 8 to 11 pounds would reduce diabetes mortality by half, and heart disease mortality by a third. If that happened, there would literally be no more healthcare cost crisis.

That's an ideal scenario, but here's what we can do in our less-than ideal world.

First, all who are able must simply begin to take responsibility for their own health and that of their families. Period. If we want to live long, full, happy lives free of pain, discomfort, disability—and debt, it's up to each of us to make it happen.

And we need to be selfish about it—in the best sense of the word. By placing the health and well-being of ourselves and our families first, and engaging in a strategy that overcomes the real and perceived barriers to success, we send a powerful message to everyone willing to listen: For the great majority of us, regardless of our history or our current circumstances, better health is possible.

As more people engage in *A/WW*, and as more positive, affirming, local conversations take place, we will begin to demonstrate that despite our many differences, we all have an opportunity to act in our own and each other's best interests—and do so without sacrificing our values or compromising our beliefs.

*All In . . . We Win!* is an idea whose time has come. Unexpected healthcare costs are already the leading cause of bankruptcy in America and skyrocketing health insurance premiums force more and more families into plans with such prohibitively high deductibles and co-pays, that even with insurance, they are unable to get the care they need when they need it.

That's either acceptable—or it's not.

It's up to us.

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