



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Dear Candidates:

The next president will assume leadership of the United States at a time when the country is undergoing a profound demographic transformation. Leading this transformation will be a major expansion of our nation's senior population.

The impact that growing numbers of seniors will have on Social Security and our major federal health care programs, Medicare and Medicaid, is well known. Less appreciated, however, is the fact that demand for housing that is both affordable and suitable for independent living by the elderly will rise dramatically in the coming years.

High housing costs already eat into the household budgets of many seniors, forcing some to scrimp on other necessities like food and medicines. Rising demand for affordable homes without a substantial increase in supply will exacerbate these pressures. Without access to affordable housing, care in a nursing home or other institutional setting may be the only option for many lower-income and frail older adults.

While ensuring a sufficient supply of safe and affordable housing for the elderly will present a major societal challenge, it also provides significant opportunities, particularly if this housing is more tightly linked to health care and supportive services. Bridging the current policy gap between housing and health has the potential to improve health outcomes for seniors, reduce the costs incurred by the health care system, and enable millions of seniors to safely and successfully "age in place" in their own homes and communities. Identifying these opportunities and ensuring they are vigorously pursued through the joint efforts of the public, private, and non-profit sectors is the goal of the [Bipartisan Policy Center Health and Housing Task Force](#), which we co-chair.¹ The Task Force intends to issue a report with policy recommendations in the Spring of 2016.

¹ Founded in 2007 by former Senate Majority Leaders Howard Baker, Tom Daschle, Bob Dole, and George Mitchell, the Bipartisan Policy Center is a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that actively seeks bipartisan solutions to some of the most complex policy issues facing our country.

Each day, approximately 10,000 Baby Boomers, the 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 who represent one of the largest demographic cohorts in American history, turn 65. As more and more Baby Boomers enter their retirement years, the elderly will constitute an increasingly larger share of the overall U.S. population. In fact, by 2030, more than one in five Americans will be 65 or older. In addition, our nation's senior population will become increasingly more diverse, in large part because of the growth in the number of seniors who are Hispanic.

Surveys show that seniors from all backgrounds overwhelmingly wish to remain in their own homes and communities as they age. Yet many homes and communities lack the structural features and support services that can enable independent living by the elderly. Failure to make the necessary modifications to support aging in place can be dangerous and expensive: Falls are the leading cause of injury and injury-related deaths for those 65 and older and account for approximately \$30 billion in health care costs each year.

On top of these concerns is the fact that 70 percent of those who reach age 65 will eventually require some form of long-term services and supports (LTSS) – that is, help with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing and medication management. Each year, family members and friends provide in excess of \$450 billion in *uncompensated* LTSS, far more than the \$100 billion that public programs spend annually for this purpose. The demand for LTSS will only increase as the senior population grows, stretching already overburdened family budgets in the absence of comprehensive reform of our long-term care system. At the same time, LTSS and other home- and community-based services can play a positive role as part of a broader effort aimed at improving chronic disease management, strengthening care coordination, and potentially reducing overall costs.

Bolstering the collaborative bonds between housing and health is unquestionably a complex endeavor. But this complexity should not deter us from taking action. With millions of Americans about to enter the senior ranks, the window of opportunity is small and narrowing.

To this end, we strongly encourage you to make senior health and housing a central issue in your respective campaigns. Today's seniors, along with the millions of Baby Boomers with aging parents, represent a huge segment of the electorate. They want to know that you understand what's at stake, are committed to ensuring an adequate supply of affordable

housing for our nation's seniors, appreciate the potential benefits of more comprehensively integrating health and housing, and are eager to develop responsible solutions.

Sincerely,

Secretary Henry Cisneros



Senator Mel Martinez



Representative Allyson Schwartz



Representative Vin Weber

