

Raising Women's Voices

FOR THE HEALTH CARE WE NEED



ORGANIZING A WOMEN'S SPEAK-OUT *for* HEALTH REFORM *in* YOUR COMMUNITY

EVENT PLANNING GUIDE

Table of Contents

- ❖ *The Value of Local Organizing for National Reform Page 2*
- ❖ *Organizing Tips from Byllye Avery Page 3*
- ❖ *The First Step – Forming a Planning CommitteePage 6*
- ❖ *The Logistics – Setting a Date and LocationPage 9*
- ❖ *Outreach – Inviting People to Your Speak-Out Page 11*
- ❖ *Get Your Message Out – Involving the Media Page 13*
- ❖ *Don't Forget – At the EventPage 16*
- ❖ *The Next Steps – Event Follow-upPage 18*
- ❖ *Appendix – Sample Materials Page 19*

The Value of Local Organizing for National Reform

Can a local women’s speak-out have an impact on state or national health reform?

Yes! A well-planned women’s speak-out for health reform can do four important things:

1. *Give grassroots women the opportunity to identify problems they are having obtaining health care and changes that would benefit them and their families;*
2. *Foster a sense that a “can do” moment has arrived, when we have a real possibility to actually accomplish health reform;*
3. *Inform these women about what they can do to help achieve health reform, and mobilize them for action;*
4. *Put pressure on state legislators and members of Congress to listen to their constituents -- the women and their families who need health reform -- and not just special interests seeking to block or dilute health reform.*

As frequent organizers of health care for families, women have “kitchen table” knowledge about what is wrong with the current system, and practical ideas about needed changes. Any health reform plan devised in Washington won’t work unless it makes sense at the kitchen table, where doctor’s appointments are discussed, the family budget is planned, health care costs are calculated and bills are paid.

The event you are planning should be a force for community empowerment, at which women are encouraged to make their voices heard – both in acknowledgment of shared experiences and as an active and vital part of a movement for change. Participating in a speak-out can help women overcome isolation, frustration and despair about health care problems, and exchange fears for hope of positive change.

The act of sharing our health care stories is one of importance and tangible worth. It is a way to put real human faces on the often abstract and dehumanizing landscape of health insurance policy, and to recognize that ultimately, the goal of health reform must be to improve the lives of human beings.

Raising Women’s Voices extends a very special thanks to Margaret Marron and Clarissa Wong for their work on this guide.

Organizing Tips from Byllye Avery

There's just a real special magic that happens when women come together to work together in an effective way for a common cause.

– BYLLYE AVERY

Byllye Avery is co-founder of *Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need*. A dreamer, a visionary and a grassroots realist, she has combined activism with social responsibility to explore women's health issues. Founder of the *National Black Women's Health Project* and the *Avery Institute for Social Change*, Byllye Avery has dedicated the last 30 years to inspiring women with her experiences, wisdom and spirit.

Raising Women's Voices intern **Clarissa Wong**, a student at Barnard College, asked Byllye Avery to share her thoughts about why women should organize for health reform and her tips about ways to plan a successful community event.



Byllye Avery



Clarissa Wong

CLARISSA: *Why should women raise our voices for health care reform? What does the Raising Women's Voices initiative mean to you?*

Byllye: The reason why women should raise our voices is because we have a unique perspective about health care and what our health care needs are, and our perspectives need to be in the mix.

Our bodies, our lives, our health and our priorities are different from men's. If you don't get the voices of everyone you run the risk of developing services that are ineffective and that don't meet the people's needs. Also, we're the caretakers. We take care of everybody -- lot of the time before we take care of ourselves -- and we make spaces for our lovers, our sisters, our aunts, our children and our families, so it's very important.

There's power in our collective voices. It's really easy to *not* do something... But it's much easier go along when see other people are doing something. You become motivated, you want to join. Our whole notion is to do good in the world, to unite with other people. There's just a real special magic that happens when women come together to work together in an effective way for a common cause.

CLARISSA: *What are some difficulties we should expect in planning a Speak out?*

Byllye: A main problem that you can easily make is not starting off with a diverse group of women doing the planning. I can't say that more than enough.

What diversity will do it is it will make sure you have an interesting, rich, textured program. So, just thinking you can do this with just two or three people is really not the way to go.

Another thing is: how do you make sure all the people get along with each other and work together? So what I say to people is, ‘well, if you’re having a problem working with anyone here, come and tell me about it. Let me know. If you’re having any problems, come talk to me.’ So people know you’re open to hearing to whatever they have to say so you, and you as a leader, have some idea of what you need to manage.

How do you manage the personalities of the people working together? There will be some flare ups and some hurt feelings. And you as the leader have to know how to talk with both sides to keep them engaged.

CLARISSA: *Were there any surprises you encountered while planning a Speak-out?*

Byllye: Once, we were planning a Health Care for Human Rights Town Meeting in Gainesville, Florida, and I was really surprised by the types of organizations who joined us and how people were calling in and asking if they can be a part of it. We had forty-plus co-sponsors, all the way from NAACP to the League of Women Voters. They may seem close to each other, but it’s a big world in between. That was one thing that surprised me.

I continue to be surprised by the number of people who really want to talk about health care. Once it was snowing in New York City, and we had a program at Harlem Hospital. It was snowing so hard that day and I just knew people won’t come. But over 200 people came in the weather. It might be just because I’m Southerner and think there’s no use in going out in the weather. But they stayed and were very interested in talking about health care. So those were pleasant surprises.

CLARISSA: *Why a Speak-out? What is the political significance of a Speak-out?*

Byllye: The political significance is, first of all, to let people know they are not alone. And for you to hear and see what the issues are from the perspectives of the people who are affected.

It also provides a wonderful dialogue between whoever the speakers are, the policy makers, the activists and the audience. It helps you get a pulse on what people want. You just put your finger right there, and you can feel the beat, and know what it is they want. People will tell you how to lead them and what they want.

Also, I’ll tell you what a surprise is to me -- how much knowledge people really have about health care and how to apply the politics to the situation. People would bring up political issues and the problems that occur -- in terms of equity, health disparities and system not working, corruption, insurance companies making off with big profits. So people really get it and connect the dots.

CLARISSA: *How can we use Speak-out events to motivate people for action?*

Byllye: First thing, do really good outreach and plan far enough in advance. It's really important to use different mediums, to use communications you have and also use the radio, because still a lot of people listen to the radio in their cars when they're driving, so don't leave out the radio. One way to do good outreach is through co-sponsors because if they get their people there, then you'll be doing a good job.

And then make sure your program is interesting and exciting. Health care reform can be really boring. Most people's eyes just roll up in their heads when you just mention it. What you have to do is plan your program so it's catchy and interesting. Spend a little time on how to be creative and use storytelling. So one of the things I like to say about health reform is: You really got to make it sexy, so that people would want to be engaged.

CLARISSA: *Are there any other active ways to raise women's voices besides hosting a Speak-out?*

Byllye: There's the whole electronic way, you know blogs. Young people like them and they are viable. Just continue to have our teleconferences. They're really good. Also have a newsletter, just to keep people closely in touch with each other and also let them know what other people are doing. It gives you a lot of good ideas and let people know you're part of a larger movement. It's *really* important to let people know you're not doing this in isolation -- that there are people doing this kind of thing all over the country.

The First Step – Forming a Planning Committee

You should put together a planning committee with representatives from a variety of interested organizations that will oversee all stages of event planning and management.

Ideally, you should start with four to six organizations, and aim to eventually include representatives of up to a dozen groups.

Who to invite

How do you decide which organizations to invite? First, reach out to community organizations you have worked with in the past. But don't stop there. Also contact groups you may not know as well, but which have members interested in health care reform. In the back of this guide you will find sample e-mail invitations you can adapt for your use. Here are some tips on groups to invite:

- *Include a college/university student group. This will ensure involvement of young people and may help you reserve space at a campus venue for reduced or no cost*
- *Include a diverse range of groups. Don't forget about:*
 - *Groups representing women of color*
 - *Groups representing low-income families/communities*
 - *Other groups representing young people*
 - *Community centers*
 - *Family planning organizations*
 - *Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender organizations*
 - *Local churches, synagogues and mosques that are known to have progressive views on women's health issues.*

It's wise to contact local branches of national organizations that advocate for women's health, such as:

- *American Association of University Women*
<http://www.aauw.org/index.cfm>
Contact info: [connect \[at\] aauw \[dot\] org](mailto:connect@aauw.org)
- *Black Women's Health Imperative*
<http://www.blackwomenshealth.org>
Contact info: [Info \[at\] BlackWomensHealth \[dot\] org](mailto:Info@BlackWomensHealth.org)
- *NARAL Pro-Choice America*
<http://www.naral.org/>
Please visit the website to find your state Chapter
- *National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum*
<http://www.napawf.org/>
Please visit the website to find your state Chapter

- *National Breast Cancer Coalition*
<http://www.stopbreastcancer.org/>
Please visit the website for contact information
- *National Council of Jewish Women*
<http://www.ncjw.org/>
Contact info: NYC headquarters: [action \[at\] ncjw \[dot\] org](mailto:action@ncjw.org)
Washington DC: [action \[at\] ncjwdc \[dot\] org](mailto:action@ncjwdc.org)
Massachusetts: [dsnyder \[at\] ncjw \[dot\] org](mailto:dsnyder@ncjw.org)
- *National Indian Women’s Health Resource Center*
<http://www.niwhrc.org/>
Contact info: [peiron \[at\] niwhrc \[dot\] org](mailto:peiron@niwhrc.org)
- *National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health*
<http://www.latinainstitute.org/>
Please visit the website for contact information
- *National Organization for LGBT Health*
<http://www.lgbthealth.net/index.shtml>
Contact info: [coalition \[at\] lgbthealth \[dot\] net](mailto:coalition@lgbthealth.net)
- *National Organization for Women*
<http://www.now.org/>
Please visit the website to find your state Chapter
- *Planned Parenthood Federation of America*
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>
Please visit the website to find your state Chapter
- *SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective*
<http://www.sistersong.net/>
Contact info: [info \[at\] sistersong \[dot\] net](mailto:info@sistersong.net)

How to organize the committee

How do you work with the planning committee? Start with an informal in-person gathering that allows members to get to know each other. Raising Women’s Voices conference planning committees, for example, have started with dinner at someone’s house. It doesn’t have to be fancy – make it a pizza party, or order Chinese food! The goal is to build relationships among a group of women who can learn to work together as a planning team.

At the first meeting of your planning committee, invite each member to say something about why she is participating, and what she hopes will be accomplished by having the Speak-out. Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, and has the attention of the other members when she is speaking.

Next, find out about the particular skills and strengths of each member. For example, some members may be good at writing. Others may excel at budgeting. Still others may have large networks of contacts they can reach out to for participation in the Speak-out. Once you know these skills and strengths, you can begin to ask members to take on tasks that are consistent with their abilities. Make sure to acknowledge everyone's contributions.

Hold meetings regularly (at least every other week) as you prepare for the Speak-out. Ask one person to take minutes of each planning meeting and e-mail them out to everyone on the committee within one week of the meeting. Set up an e-mail group that you all get use to communicate with each other regularly.

The Logistics – Setting a Date and Location

Here are some things to consider when picking a date and time for your Speak-out:

- *Make sure it does not fall on any religious or other holidays (consult various calendars for this)*
- *Make sure that there are no other events being put together by other local organizations. Start asking around early to make sure you don't choose a date/time with a competing event.*
- *Pick a date 2 to 4 months away in order to allow enough time to fully prepare and plan for the event.*
- *If you are hoping for a particular guest speaker, confirm his/her availability and then work around that*
- *Consider traffic patterns in the location you choose for that time of day*
- *Decide if daytime or nighttime is better, depending on work schedules of people you are hoping will attend*

Here are some things to consider when deciding on a location:

How big a space will you need? How many people do you think you can attract for your event? Try asking each member of your planning committee how many people she believes she could invite.

What is a location that would attract the most people, and be convenient to reach? Consider whether it is close to bus, subway and/or commuter rail lines, or parking lots, if in a suburban area. Make sure to publicize how convenient it is to get to your event through these methods of transportation.

What is the cost to rent the space? Is there a deposit fee? How much do you have available to spend? Try to find a venue that will not charge you at all. Ask colleagues for free locations where they have held events. Examples include **libraries**, which often have conference rooms open to the public upon reservation, but also may have limited hours; community rooms at **churches, synagogues and other religious-affiliated facilities; public schools, community centers, senior centers, municipal offices**, which may have conference rooms open to the public upon reservation; **hospitals**, which may have conference rooms open to the public upon reservation; **colleges or universities** (often requires co-sponsorship with an office or group within the institution); **office building** atrium areas or reception rooms.

Are you required to use a specific caterer for food? This often can involve significant cost. Or, can you bring in your own refreshments (much cheaper!)

Does the location have microphones and any AV equipment you might need? It can be very expensive to rent microphones and other electronic equipment. Try to find a location that is already equipped. Make sure to ask if there are any fees for use of this equipment, or if you have to hire someone from their organization to operate it.

Is the location accessible to people with disabilities? You will want to invite women with disabilities to participate in your speak-out. Make sure you pick a space that is easily reachable by people with wheelchairs or with other disabilities.

Are there any other competing events going on at the same location at the same time? If so, will the competing event disrupt your Speak-out?

Choosing an Emcee or Moderator for Your Event

You will have greater success attracting people to your event if you are able to secure an **emcee and/or moderator who are well-known and respected women** in the community. At the Raising Women's Voices speak-out in New York City on April 1, the emcee will be **Byllye Avery**, nationally-known women's health advocate and founder of the Black Women's Health Imperative. The moderator will be **Dr. Nancy Snyderman**, NBC News Chief Medical Editor.

In your own community, you might ask a woman who is a local television anchor, or someone who leads a community health organization. Secure your emcee and/or moderator before you start your publicity, because **the participation of a well-known person will help attract participants to your event.**

Setting up a system for RSVPs or pre-registration

You will want to keep track of how many people are planning to come to your event, so that you can make sure you have enough seats and refreshments for everyone. In addition, you will want to closely monitor the types of organizations that are signing up, in order to make sure there is enough diversity among the women and organizations that are participating. So, devise a system by which participants are asked to RSVP or pre-register, with their names, organizations and contact information. You can always welcome on-site registration, but try to get a good idea of how many people will be there ahead of time. You'll be well-prepared!

Outreach – Inviting People to Your Speak-Out

Once you have a date, time and location for your Speak-out, you will want to reach out to a broad array of progressive organizations, but avoid unintentionally attracting individuals and/or organizations that are anti-health reform or anti-choice, and could disrupt your event. **So, the best advice is to start with people and organizations you already know.**

First, ask each member of your planning committee to send invitations out to organizations with which they are familiar. For example, an organization representing victims of sexual assault probably belongs to coalitions of similar organizations and is part of list-serves linking those groups. The representatives from the sexual assault victims group should be asked to utilize those contacts to invite colleagues.

You want to ensure that a broad array of voices is represented, but you must also ensure that the event is a safe space for women to tell their stories. In order to strike this critical balance, we have found that it better to do targeted outreach as opposed to mass media calls for participation. One of the aims of Raising Women’s Voices is to create space for groups that are not traditionally involved in health care reform. To ensure this at your speak-out, outreach will be a key component of your planning.

The first step is to reach out to friends and colleagues. Send out both personal emails to friends and colleagues and mass emails on listservs to which you belong (see samples in the appendices). You should also contact particularly important guests, with personalized invitations. In all of these mailings, include information on how and when to RSVP for the event.

Getting the message out to the community

Aside from electronic outreach, you’ll want to reach out in other ways as well. About a month before the speak-out you can begin to post flyers in specific locations. Some ideas:

- *Community health centers*
- *Women’s health clinics*
- *College/university campuses (specifically women’s studies and public health departments)*

We’ve included sample flyers at the end of this guide, for you to use and adapt for your needs.

You’ll want to **ramp up your outreach in the month of the speak-out**. One way to do this is to leave leaflets with local community organizations during the month of the event. You can ask other organizations to publicize your event at their events, and you can offer to do the same at the speak-out.

Don't forget to **use social networking** sites to get the word out. Create a Facebook page for the event, and post event information on your MySpace, website or blog. Also, ask bloggers that you know to help you announce the event. Be sure and let us at RWV know, and we'll post the event to our blog as well!

Be sure and send out mailing and/or email reminders to those who expressed interest with event details and instructions on how to participate/share stories. Community organizations are often under-resourced so you must commit to working to facilitate their participation. Reminders are very important!

In your reminder email, you might include the **A Woman's Vision for Quality, Affordable Health Care for All**, available for download on www.raisingwomensvoices.net This is a set of principles developed by RWV to serve as a guideline in order to keep our broader policy goals in mind when sharing personal stories. Sending out a targeted mailing that includes the principles, will allow attendees to know the issues ahead of time. At the event, you can provide attendees with leaflets or cards stating the principles, as a way of prompting them to tell their individualized stories with these wider policy goals in mind.

In the days leading up to the event

In the final days, **make reminder calls and send emails** to those invitees who RSVP'd or expressed interest earlier. Ask if they need any more details about the event, or logistical support in getting to the speak-out. To ensure that you have some speakers lined up, ask a few people for a definite commitment, and let them know that they'll be on the list of initial speakers.

Having some **dedicated staff to work with these participants** can be extremely helpful. This can be as simple as having a staff person call those that are interested in telling their stories at the speak-out to give them a chance to practice telling their story. This will help them organize their thoughts, give them a chance to ask questions about the event, and feel well-prepared to speak in front of an audience. Given that personal stories about health care can often be difficult, a little preparation can go a long way in making your participants feel comfortable and safe. Additionally, having staff available to offer support and assistance to speakers during and after the event is another way to create a safe and supportive space to share personal stories.

Check out the speak-out venue. If this is not a space that you work in regularly, take the time to have a walk-through of the space with someone who manages it, so you can address any concerns about accessibility and layout.

Get Your Message Out – Involving the Media

One way to amplify the voices of women participating in your speak-out is to invite news media coverage. That way, even people who do not attend your event may learn about the issues you are highlighting by reading or listening to news reports. But, involving the news media takes some thought and preparation.

Before you even consider inviting media, you should answer the following questions:

- *Is there any problem with inviting media to the location you have chosen? Are there rules about media coverage? Make sure to ask for permission.*
- *Is the room large enough to accommodate news cameras and reporters, as well as the participants in your Speak-out?*
- *How are the acoustics?*
- *Will there be any unexpected fees charged by the venue for use of media equipment, such as a sound board?*
- *Is there a separate room or a quiet corridor where reporters could take people to do private interviews?*

If you are able to address all of these questions, then you are ready to move on to the next steps in planning media coverage.

First, consider whether you want to use the media to invite people to your event, by placing notices in community calendars or by having a feature article done in advance of the event. While such advance publicity can help draw people to your event, it will also make the event more unpredictable than if you simply invite people using your contacts and those of your planning committee and sponsors. It is always possible that strangers could show up with the intent of disrupting your event. Think about whether your sponsoring organizations are involved in any controversies that might attract opponents. So, consider the risk of this happening before going ahead with advance publicity.

If you decide to go ahead and use advance publicity, prepare **a one-page announcement of the event that describes the purpose, gives the date, time and location, announces any well-known speakers and invites women to sign up in advance to tell personal stories at the Speak-out.** Give an RSVP e-mail or a telephone number of your office or someone else on the planning committee who women can contact to find out more about the event and sign up to speak. Send the announcement out to local news media four weeks prior to the event. (For monthly publications, you may need to submit the announcement even further in advance.)

Next, you will need to prepare a **media advisory to be sent out to local newspapers, radio stations and television stations one week to 10 days in advance of your event.** At this point, you should choose a media point person within your office, who will be in charge of creating and distributing

the media advisory (usually by e-mail or fax) and answering questions from reporters and assignment editors about the event. This person's name should be prominently listed on the media advisory. ***See sample media advisory in the appendices.*** Many local civic or women's organizations have lists of local reporters and their contact information. Ask your planning committee or you supporters for such a list. If no one has such a list, you can find the information yourself by going on the internet and searching the websites of your local news media. Usually, they include telephone and fax numbers for the news departments, and frequently they list e-mails you can use to send it event announcement and media advisories.

As the date for your speak-out gets closer, your media contact person should follow up on the Media Advisory by calling to make sure news editors or assignment editors have received the Media Advisory. If they have not, or have lost it, offer to re-send the announcement. Ask, politely, if they are planning to send a reporter. Offer directions to the Speak-out location.

If your media point person is contacted by a reporter looking for an advance interview or someone to interview on the day of the event, decide who from your organization should speak to the media. Usually, it is best if this person has had some previous experience with reporters. But, here are some tips that anyone can use in communicating with the news media.

- *Have a clear and concise explanation of the purpose and message of the speak-out*
 - *For some inspiration, see the interview with Byllye Avery in the beginning of this guide*
 - *Frame your thoughts in reference to a few key questions:*
 - *Why focus on women's voices in health care reform?*
 - *Why a speak-out?*
 - *What do you hope will come out of this event?*
- *Know who your audience is and hit the talking points that will most resonate with that group of people*
- *Stick with one strong key message throughout the interview*
- *Incorporate a good "sound bite," which is a short, quotable phrase that makes your point effectively and is unlikely to be shortened by the reporter.*
 - *Avoid weak words, such as: hoping, wishing, trying, would like*
 - *Use strong words, such as: working, organizing, building, creating, fostering, want, call on, demand*
 - *An example might be: "We support quality, affordable health care for all – and we are working to raise women's voices for the health care we need."*
 - *Or, you could say: "Women are the organizers of health care for our families, so we know best what changes would make the health system work better for everyone."*
- *Make sure to mention Raising Women's Voices – our website, blog, newsletter, and Facebook group*

- *Do not read directly from a piece of paper*
- *Anticipate questions and practice your talking points*
- *If you are caught off guard by a reporter seeking a telephone interview, it is okay to get his/her contact information and say you will call back in a few moments so you can have some time to gather your thoughts*
- *Say “I don’t know” when you don’t know*
- *Offer to get back to the reporter with information*
- *Keep your answers short and simple and stop talking when you’ve made your point*
- *Avoid personal commentary and partisan opinions*

On the day of the event, make sure your media contact person has a cell phone at which she can be reached by reporters looking for directions. Make sure the contact person leaves this cell phone on during the event to take media calls.

Before the event starts, identify a location where a television or print photographer can take a good shot to illustrate the event:

- *Make sure the background is not cluttered with objects or crowded with people*
- *If a daytime event, make sure the sunlight will not interfere with the shot in the designated space*
- *Be sure to have the RWV and your sponsoring organization’s logos visible in the background*

Before the event, discuss with your emcee and/or moderator whether she would be willing to do brief interviews just prior to the event, or after it is over.

Reporters will be interested in interviewing some of the women who are telling personal stories at your event. You should try to identify in advance some women who are willing to be interviewed. By having women pre-register to give testimony, you will have their contact information and can seek their permission in advance. Alternatively, you can advise women arriving at the event that there will be news coverage, and ask if some of them would be willing to be interviewed separately. Prepare a list of these women and be able to identify them when a reporter shows up.

Don't Forget! – at the Event

Your own experiences attending conferences and speak-outs in the past can help you make sure that your event runs smoothly. As a guest, you already know a great deal about what makes for a successful event and what can hinder the inclusiveness, comfort, and effectiveness of such events.

Depending on the length and time of day of your event, you will want to provide some selection of food and beverages. Remember to cater to various dietary restrictions, such as vegetarian, vegan, kosher, etc. If the event exceeds two hours, allow for a ten-minute bathroom/refreshment break in the middle.

Planning an event that will be inclusive for a diverse group of guests requires foresight and knowledge of special needs of those attending.

- *Determine if you will need translators*
- *Arrange for adequate adult supervision of children, if necessary (and if so, advertise this in flyers and invitations)*
- *Develop a plan to respond if speakers become emotional while telling their stories. This might include having a box of tissues on hand; having a staff person there to offer a hug or some other gesture of comfort and solidarity (take into account cultural considerations); and if the speaker becomes so emotional that she is unable to continue with her story, having someone to escort her to the refreshments table for a drink of water, or the hallway/bathroom for privacy.*
- *Ensure that the space is fully accessible and that all ramps and elevators are in working condition.*

It is important to greet guests and media personnel as they arrive. Have a sign-in table where the agenda and any RWV or cosponsoring organizations' materials are available. This can be a great opportunity to collect contact information and expand your organizational network. You may also want to assign a media point person to greet media personnel specifically, answer their questions, help set up equipment, and guide them to their seats.

As for physical appearance and layout of the venue, effective branding of your event will require planning ahead in designing and ordering a podium sign, a banner, posters, buttons, and other branded giveaways. Also decide ahead of time what kind of microphone set-up you want to use. Take into account the approximate number of attendees, the number of people expected to share stories, the size of the room, storytellers' comfort, etc. Some layout options include:

- *One microphone at a podium in the front of the room*
- *One or two microphones in the aisles*
 - *Note: If the turnout is expected to be big, having people line up at the microphones could be distracting, might block audience members' view, and will be disappointing if not everyone in line will have time to share their stories. Have people sign-up to speak as they come in and have a person at the back of the room to take names. This way you can call on people, and avoid forming lines.*

- *Be sure to have the RWV and your sponsoring organization's logos visible in the background*

Consider providing a small token of appreciation to the women who share their stories, such as gift cards for use at a local drugstore. Certificates of participation are also a nice gesture, to demonstrate that you value their time and perspective. This is in line with RWV's goal to facilitate the sharing of women's stories, rather than taking them for use in our own work without demonstrating appreciation of the women who have shared their stories.

Be creative in ending the event on a positive note. This may mean devoting the last portion of the program to how individuals can get involved in the movement for women's health advocacy and reform. Have a table at the back with various materials and handouts so that people can check out these tables as they grab some snacks and filter out. Materials may include:

- *Questions to ask public officials (See www.raisingwomensvoices.net for fact-sheets and talking points.)*
- *An organizing guide*
- *RWV's Resource Guide to Women & Health Reform (see resource guide handout)*
- *Cosponsoring organizations' sign-up sheets to subscribe to newsletters and information about their upcoming events*

The Next Steps – Event Follow-up

There are two main goals of effective event follow-up. First, take advantage of various media and technology outlets in order to disseminate coverage of your event to a wider audience. This means following up with media contacts to get footage of the event aired on a cable television station; posting links to audio and video recordings on your blog and website; sending copies of recordings to the Raising Women’s Voices New York office; and emailing links to audio and video recordings to other organizations present at the event so that they can distribute them as well.

The second objective is to thank participants and attendees and, in doing so, establish ongoing lines of communication. Send thank you letters via email or postal mail to participants and media contacts within the first month following the event and include links to the RWV blog, website and organizing guide (see sample thank you letter/email). With all this careful planning and organizing, the event will surely serve as a launch for many future collaborative efforts, with a newly energized group of community members and organizations to help achieve quality, affordable, health care for all!

Appendix – Sample Materials

1. SAMPLE LETTER OR E-MAIL TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS SEEKING PARTICIPATION IN YOUR PLANNING COMMITTEE AND CO-SPONSORSHIP OF YOUR SPEAK-OUT

Dear [NAME OF CONTACT PERSON OR NAME OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION] ,

A local coalition is forming to plan a Women’s Speak-out for Health Reform in [NAME OF YOUR COMMUNITY OR REGION]. We would like to invite you and your organization to join us!

Our goal is to engage women from our area in demonstrating the critical need for national [AND STATE, IF APPLICABLE IN YOUR STATE] action on health reform this year. Women from all walks of life will be invited to share personal stories about problems getting quality, affordable health care for ourselves and our families, and suggest improvements that could be made. Examples of the problems we want to highlight include: lack of insurance coverage; coverage that is too expensive to use because of high co-pays and deductibles; insurance plans that refuse to cover certain services or treatment for pre-existing conditions, such as breast cancer; discrimination against women in the cost of health insurance; and health disparities based on race, class, sexual orientation and immigrant status.

We would like to invite you and your organization to: a) become involved in the planning of this speak-out and b) become a co-sponsor of the event. The planning committee will meet regularly [INDICATE HOW OFTEN] to choose a location and date, find a moderator or emcee, plan outreach and prepare materials for the event. The first meeting will be on [ADD DATE AND TIME] at [ADD LOCATION]. Co-sponsors will be asked to contribute volunteers, publicize the speak-out in their newsletters, blogs, mass emails, and at events; help raise any funds needed to pay for costs of the event and assist us in finding women willing to share their stories at the speak-out.

Your participation would be very welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

Best Wishes,

[YOUR NAME]

2. SAMPLE MASS-EMAIL INVITING ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING

Fed up with our broken health care system? Angry about expensive health insurance that doesn't pay for the care that you and your family need? Outraged that insurance companies in some states can deny coverage for pre-existing conditions like breast cancer?

Join us on [DATE/TIME] at [LOCATION] for Women's Speak-out for Action on Health Reform!

Women are often the arrangers of health care for our entire families. So, we are inviting women to share stories of how they and their family members have struggled with the current system, and what needs to change! Among the topics we want to address are:

- *Employers that are dropping health coverage for their workers;*
- *Insurer denials of coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions, such as breast cancer and even having given birth via caesarean section;*
- *Disparities in access to and quality of health care depending on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, income level, occupation, age, and disability;*
- *Deductibles and co-pays that are so expensive that even people with health insurance can't afford to use it;*
- *Premiums that are so costly that 45 million Americans are uninsured, the overwhelming majority of whom are employed;*
- *Confusing and frustrating health insurance rules and billing systems;*
- *Prescription drug plans that don't cover the medicines we need, such as birth control;*
- *Failure of health insurance to cover home care and help for women caring for elderly relatives.*

We are committed to raising women's voices in state and national debates over health care reform, so that women's perspectives about their health care needs and those of their families can be powerfully articulated, genuinely considered and incorporated into health care reform plans. All those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to [CONTACT NAME, EMAIL, PHONE #] by [RSVP DATE] .

Best Wishes,
[YOUR NAME]

3. SAMPLE MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT OF YOUR EVENT

[LETTERHEAD OF LOCAL SPONSORING ORGANIZATION]

Women’s Speak-Out for Quality, Affordable Health Care for All:

Community Members are Invited to Share their Stories

For immediate release: [DATE]

Contact: [NAME, PHONE #, EMAIL]

Fed up with our broken health care system? Angry about expensive health insurance that doesn’t pay for the care that you and your family need? Outraged that insurance companies in some states can deny coverage for pre-existing conditions like breast cancer?

Speak-out for quality, affordable health care for all at a special forum co-sponsored by [NAME OF YOUR LOCAL ORGANIZATION] and a national initiative, Raising Women’s Voices for the Health Care We Need . The Speak-out will take place on [DATE/TIME] at [LOCATION] .

Women are often the arrangers of health care for our entire families. So, we are inviting women to share stories of how they and their family members have struggled with the current system, and what needs to change! Among the topics we want to address are:

- *Employers that are dropping health coverage for their workers;*
- *Insurer denials of coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions such as breast cancer and even having given birth via caesarean section;*
- *Disparities in access to and quality of health care depending on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, income level, occupation, age, and disability.*
- *Deductibles and co-pays that are so expensive that even people with health insurance can’t afford to use it.*
- *Premiums that are so costly that 45 million Americans are uninsured, the overwhelming majority of whom are employed.*
- *Confusing and frustrating health insurance rules and billing systems;*
- *Prescription drug plans that don’t cover the medicines we need, such as birth control;*
- *Failure of health insurance to cover home care and help for women caring for elderly relatives.*

We are committed to raising women's voices in state and national debates over health care reform, so that women's perspectives about their health care needs and those of their families can be powerfully articulated, genuinely considered and incorporated into health care reform plans. All those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to [CONTACT NAME, EMAIL, PHONE #] by [RSVP DATE] .

4. SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY (TO GO OUT A WEEK PRIOR TO THE EVENT)



MEDIA ADVISORY FOR PLANNING PURPOSES, March 27, 2009

DATE OF EVENT: Wednesday, April 1, 2009

TIME: 7:30-9:30 p.m. (doors open at 7 p.m.)

WHERE: InterChurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive at 119th Street, Manhattan

(enter through Claremont Avenue side of building)

CONTACT: Lois Uttley at 212-870-2010 or [lois \[at\] mergerwatch \[dot\] org](mailto:lois[at]mergerwatch[dot]org)

WOMEN'S SPEAK-OUT FOR ACTION ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

NEW YORK – While lawmakers in Washington, D.C. and state capitals debate the merits and costs of health reform, women around the nation are struggling to get affordable health care for our families. For many women and our families, health reform cannot come too soon.

On April 1, women from across New York City will speak out publicly about the problems they and their families are experiencing with the current health system, such as:

- *Insurance premiums that are unaffordable;*
- *Co-pays and deductibles that are so costly women can't afford to use insurance, if they have it;*
- *Limits on coverage for pre-existing medical conditions;*
- *Plans that don't cover maternity and other reproductive health services;*
- *Inability of small business owners to offer employee health coverage;*
- *Confusing rules and confounding billing systems;*
- *Lack of translators for families who do not speak English*

Emcee will be **Byllye Avery**, founder of the Black Women's Health Imperative. Moderator will be **Dr. Nancy Snyderman**, Chief Medical Editor of NBC News.

Health policy experts will be on hand to link women's personal stories to needed reforms in the health system. They include:

Wendy Chavkin, M.D., Professor at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University;

Susan Wood, PhD, Director of the Jacobs Institute for Women's Health at George Washington University (and former Director of Women's Health for the FDA);

Deborah Reid, J.D., attorney with the National Health Law Program in Washington, D.C.; and

Lynn Paltrow, J.D., Director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women. Representatives of city council, state legislative and Congressional offices have been invited.

Note: *Experts and women telling personal stories will be available for media interviews.*

5. SAMPLE PROGRAM, FROM RWV NATIONAL SPEAK-OUT IN NYC

Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
SPEAK-OUT FOR ACTION ON HEALTH REFORM



The InterChurch Center
475 Riverside Drive at 119th Street
Rooms A-D
Morningside Heights, NYC

7:00 – 7:30 p.m. Speak-out sign-ins, refreshments and informational tabling

7:15 p.m. Welcoming performance by the InterChurch Center Gospel Choir

7:30 – 9:30 pm – National Women's Speak-out for Action on Health Reform

Nancy Snyderman, M.D., Moderator

Opportunity for women and health providers to tell their stories about experiences they and/or their family members have had with the health system (3 to 5 minutes each).

Respondents will identify health reform issues illustrated by the personal stories:

- ❖ **Byllye Avery**, President, Avery Institute for Social Change
- ❖ **Wendy Chavkin, M.D.**, Prof. at Columbia University School of Public Health
- ❖ **Lynn Paltrow, J.D.**, Director, National Advocates for Pregnant Women
- ❖ **Deborah Reid, J.D.**, Attorney with the National Health Law Program
- ❖ **Susan Wood** (former FDA Director of Women's Health), now Director of the Jacobs Institute for Women's Health at George Washington University

9:30 to 10 p.m. – Tabling, informal networking, refreshments

6. SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear [PARTICIPANT'S NAME] ,

Thank you for participating in our Women's Speak-out for Health Reform on [INSERT DATE] . We truly appreciated your efforts on behalf of achieving quality, affordable health care that meets the needs of women and our families.

We hope you have been inspired to become more actively involved in advocating for health reform this year. You can learn more about what women across the nation are doing to speak-out for health reform by visiting www.RaisingWomensVoices.net, reading the blog of Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need and signing up for the RWG e-newsletter.

Locally, we are planning a meeting to discuss what we learned at the speak-out and how we can become involved in the efforts of health care organizations in our region. This meeting will take place on [DATE] at [LOCATION] . We hope you will join us there!

Thank you again,
[YOUR NAME]



Women and Health Reform Resource Guide

Learn more about our Action Campaign!

Key Issues:

- ❖ Discriminatory insurance company practices affecting women with pre-existing conditions, such as breast cancer, diabetes, asthma, pregnancy or even having had a cesarean section delivery.
- ❖ Health disparities that affect women of color, women with disabilities, low-income women, young women, immigrant women and women in the LGBT community.
- ❖ Making health coverage affordable for women and families by addressing the increasing cost of insurance premiums, deductibles and co-pays.

For more information on health care facts, an organizing guide, and questions to ask public officials, see <http://www.raisingwomensvoices.net/>

Check out our blog at <http://raisingwomensvoices08.wordpress.com/>
Subscribe to our e-newsletter by e-mailing us at info@raisingwomensvoices.net

Health Care for America Now – <http://healthcareforamericanow.org/>

National coalition of progressive organizations working to fight unjust insurance company practices and advocating for quality, affordable health care for all.

Physicians for a National Health Program – <http://www.pnhp.org>

Organization of physician and consumer activists working for a universal, comprehensive single-payer national health program.

Families USA – <http://www.familiesusa.org/>

Dedicated to the achievement of high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans.

Community Catalyst – <http://www.communitycatalyst.org/>

Works to build the consumer and community leadership that is required to transform the American health system.

National Women's Law Center – <http://www.nwlc.org/>

Uses the law in all its forms to protect and advance the progress of women and girls at work, in school, and in virtually every aspect of their lives.