

Hello and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington, with the program that helps you learn and improve your American English. Today we talk about something that is important to all of us ...our health. First we'll hear about some ideas to help older people live a better life.

Then we will mix health and politics in the United States. Many experts believe President Obama's new health care law will play a large part in how Americans vote this fall.

So pull up a chair and stay a while. VOA Learning English is on the air.

This past Monday was World Health Day. The event is held every year on April seventh to mark the anniversary of the launch of the World Health Organization in 1948.

A non-governmental organization used the event this year to warn that 76 million older people around the world are not getting the health care they need. Anna Matteo has more on the organization HelpAge International and its proposal to help older adults.

HelpAge International is seeking to increase understanding through a public awareness campaign called Age Demands Action. Amleset Tewodros is the group's Country Director for Tanzania. She says millions of older adults are not getting the care they need for diseases and long-term medical conditions.

She says the Age Demands Action campaign empowers them to demand the right to health services. She says it gives them a chance to present their demands and requests to local policy and decision-makers.

Amleset Tewodros says the major concern in modern health care is on infectious and childhood diseases. She says health care programs usually do not have a life-long plan for good health.

She adds that lack of respect and discrimination can also be barriers to satisfactory health care for older people.

“Old age is associated with diseases. So older people are not treated for the illnesses they present, but rather they’re looked at – ‘oh, you are old and resources are limited. Those should be directed to young people, to children.’ So these are some of the constraints that are limiting older people’s access.”

She notes that in many developing countries, policy makers are concerned about building hospitals and hospital admissions, which can be costly. As a result, she says, policy makers are less concerned about health promotion and prevention, especially for age-related diseases and conditions. In addition, she says, many health care workers may not have enough training to help older patients.

The HelpAge International official says guaranteeing health care to everyone would help solve many of these problems. She says many people now are unable to pay for a visit to the doctor or the cost of drugs. She says political will can overcome concerns about cost.

“We have experiences in a number of countries where we have seen positive progress, which did not require a huge investment. It is an issue of commitment and policy adjustment – making sure health policymakers, programmers, do take into account the specific need, the unique needs of older population groups and provide appropriate, affordable and accessible health care. That is the message.”

HelpAge International is warning that the life expectancy rate in nearly 40 countries is either unchanged at 60 years or has fallen. It says community health care is necessary to guarantee older adults have a good quality of life. I’m Anna Matteo.

Health Care Will Affect U.S. Elections This Fall

This November, Americans will vote in congressional elections. President Barack Obama's health care law will be a major issue in the election campaign. The Obama administration recently announced that more than seven million people have signed up for the new health insurance program. As a result, some congressional Democrats are now more hopeful about their chances of being re-elected. Jonathan Evans explains how health and politics will come together in the voting booth.

The health care law is showing signs of gaining wider public acceptance. Volunteers were busy at a recent sign-up event in Los Angeles. Elliot Petty was one of those volunteers.

"You know it is really going great today. People are really hungry for health care."

Supporters of the new law want to sign up young people like Danny Segovia. Until recently, he avoided buying a health care policy.

“If I get covered right now, then I am good. I could feel comfortable about myself playing sports.”

President Obama recently noted the growing number of Americans signing up for the program, commonly called Obamacare. He spoke at the White House.

“I will always work with anyone who is willing to make this law work even better. But the debate over repealing this law is over. The Affordable Care Act is here to stay!”

Democratic Party activists hope what the President says is true. But Republican Party leaders continue to criticize the health care law. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, John Boehner, believes the law is harmful to the American people and the economy.

“I can give you hundreds of letters from my constituents who have been harmed by this law.”

John Thune is a Republican Senator from South Dakota. He is also against the health care law.

“And of course, there is the Obamacare legislation, which passed several years ago and continues to wreak havoc on job creation in this country.”

But Democratic Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois disagrees. He believes the two parties should work together on possible changes to the law.

“But not a single Republican has been willing to sit down and work on bipartisan compromises and changes. Not one.”

Carroll Doherty works for the Pew Research Center. He says opposition to the law will increase the number of Republican voters in November.

“Well, it is an animating factor for the Republican base. With turnout being so important this is an issue that I think does really get people upset and excited, especially on the Republican side.”

John Fortier is with the Bipartisan Policy Center. He says health care will not be the only issue in the election campaign this year.

“I think the two biggest factors underlying a midterm election are: how is the economy doing, and how is the president in the White House doing? And ultimately midterm elections do not go very well for the president’s party, they tend to go against it.”

The results of the elections may have a major effect on President Obama’s final two years in office. I’m Jonathan Evans.

And I’m Jim Tedder in Washington. Before we leave you to make room for more Learning English programs, here is just a small bit of American history.

In 1847, on this date, Joseph Pulitzer was born. He was a journalist and newspaper publisher for whom the famous prizes are named. By the way, you may have heard someone call it the “PEW-lit-zer Prize,” but that is not the way Joseph pronounced his name. It is always correctly pronounced as “PULL-it-zer.”

In New Orleans, Louisiana, today nearly half a million people are celebrating the “French Quarter Festival” with art, food, and lots of what this wonderful city is known for ...jazz music. We'll see you tomorrow!

