Health care reform is in the air these days, and it isn't just about more tweaks to the system. For instance, a group of U.S. health executives on Thursday launched Health CEOs for Health Reform, which will study how to change the way hospitals do business in order to reach the goal of universal care.

It wants to recommend concrete plans for meaningful change to the president and Congress.

But more eye-opening, and a whole lot closer to home, we learned last week that the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Board has approved a resolution asserting that health care is a "basic human right" and that everyone has a "right to access to a universal health care system."

Board members plan to appoint a task force to assess local needs. Then the board will try to come up with a system to ensure that health care is readily available to everyone in the county and the Helena area.

According to the board, there'll be no more waiting for national health-care reform. "I fully understand that this is ambitious and a little bit idealistic," said Dr. David Krainacker, board chairman. "But discussion has to start somewhere." He said it is clear that reform isn't going to come from the top, so it will have to come from the bottom.

The board has been working with the Montana Human Rights Network and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, which may help it obtain grants to help pay for the project.

Impatience is understandable. As board member and City Commissioner Alan Peura told the IR State Bureau, "It's been 60 years since the feds have been talking about the concept of universal health care, and we still have 21 percent uninsured (in the greater Helena area and the county)."

Of course it is too early to know what the board will come up with, from a real single-payer system...
for the region to expanding local health care clinics. And it is way too early to tell if the effort will succeed.

Nevertheless we applaud the attempt, as well as the declaration of a "basic human right." In the 21st century, health care for all is way overdue.

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