

## Dr. Who?

What's your doctor's name? Many Americans can't answer that question because they don't have an ongoing relationship with a primary care physician. Developing this relationship is the best way to make sure you get the care that's right for you, and may even help to slow the rising cost of health care. One of the major reasons health care costs are increasing is that each year millions of Americans use emergency rooms for routine medical care instead of visiting their primary care physicians. Last year there were about 11.5 million visits to emergency rooms for non-emergency care. The average emergency room visit costs \$383,<sup>1</sup> while the average doctor's office visit is only \$60.<sup>2</sup> Unnecessary E.R. visits can delay care for people with true emergencies, and cost all of us billions of dollars.

One of the best ways to reduce health care costs is to know your doctor and make sure he or she knows you. Share your medical history and ask about preventive measures you can take to avoid illness or manage diseases. Let your doctor know about all medications you're taking, even those prescribed by specialists, over-the-counter medicines and herbal remedies. Keep track of your child's immunizations. Make sure you don't miss important immunizations that protect your children from disease. In fact, only 76 percent of children in the U.S. are fully immunized by age two, and levels in some areas of the country it's as low as 10 percent.<sup>3</sup> For every dollar spent on a vaccine, up to \$30 is saved in health care costs for treating such diseases as mumps, measles, rubella and polio.<sup>4</sup>

Having an ongoing relationship with a primary care physician can help keep everyone in your family healthy and help keep health care affordable for all Americans.

<sup>1</sup>New England Journal of Medicine, "The Costs of Visits to Emergency Departments," 1996

<sup>2</sup>American Medical Association, "Physician Socioeconomic Statistics," 2001

<sup>3</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Immunization Survey," 2000

<sup>4</sup>Every Child by Two