An unlikely partnership is leading a movement toward meaningful reform for more than 50 million patients each year.

Our new partnership is spearheading a national effort to shape meaningful reform, starting with universal healthcare coverage for all Americans—coverage that is secure, affordable and portable. Why? Because we need to bring quality—a topic that encompasses access, affordability, efficiency and cost containment—to the forefront of our nation’s healthcare reform debate.

Americans know all too well that our healthcare system isn’t working, and many healthcare providers, unions and elected officials alike have spent the past 20 years advocating for fundamental reform. But the healthcare debate that most Americans actually hear boils down to a choice between two options: Either expand access for the uninsured and pay more or control costs and get less.

In that climate of false choices, it’s no surprise that we’re further than ever from a real solution to our healthcare crisis. For too long, the healthcare debate in this country has been about financing. It should be about fundamentals.

And the fundamental focus, the most essential concern of our national healthcare system, should be the topic of quality. Costs can be contained, healthcare outcomes can improve across entire communities, and we can spur innovations in healthcare delivery that will change the lives of millions if we focus on quality.

As we all know, chronic-care patients account for only 20% of U.S. patients, but an incredible 75% of our healthcare spending.

This week, on March 19, the Partnership for Quality Care will hold its first summit in Washington to target the core problem of chronic care and highlight cutting-edge solutions that are already improving health outcomes while containing costs.

In Northern California, for example, Kaiser Permanente has taken aim at heart disease with a combination of preventive programs and evidence-based medicine. By prescribing equally effective generic medications to patients with high blood pressure where appropriate, it was able to expand its management of heart disease while controlling costs.

The best measure of success? Heart disease mortality rates have dropped 30% among its Northern California members compared with the general population. Today, heart disease is no longer the No. 1 killer among Kaiser members in the region, bucking the national trend.

At the summit, a half-dozen other leading institutions will join SEIU Healthcare in unveiling real-world programs that are successfully addressing challenges all providers face such as using technology to evaluate the effectiveness of chronic-care regimes; reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the treatment of chronic disease; and involving chronic-care patients in the monitoring and treatment of their own conditions.

Healthcare reform is happening right now; the right models are being developed today in communities around the country. If we can bring quality to the center of the debate, we can bring innovation and excellence to healthcare delivery. There’s no greater challenge than this, and no greater success story for our patients and communities.

Denis Rivera, (left) the chairman of the Service Employees International Union’s SEIU Healthcare, also serves as the chairman of Partnership for Quality Care. George Halvorson is chairman and chief executive officer of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals and serves as the partnership’s secretary.