We have a problem. Health care is unaffordable. This is hardly a surprise, but the scale of the problem often leaves us feeling helpless. As physicians, we have all seen the effects of unaffordable health care on our patients. It can take many shapes—delayed treatment, unfilled prescriptions, insurance with out-of-reach deductibles, personal debt. Something has to change. And who better to lead this change than physicians?

A tough job? Sure, but we've done the hard work before; the MMA isn't afraid of stepping out front on important issues. We stand up to the tobacco industry; we stand up against insurance company hassles; we stand up for access to care for low-income Minnesotans; we stand up for the physician-patient relationship. And we've demonstrated our ability to lead and bring about big changes.

Before the Affordable Care Act, Minnesota moved forward on its own with comprehensive state-based health care reform. That was the direct result of work by the MMA. Based on the MMA's Physicians' Plan for a Healthy Minnesota, we created the Healthy Minnesota Partnership for Reform and brought together physicians, legislators, educators and leaders of health plans, hospitals, clinics and consumer groups to rally around a set of reform proposals. The group developed legislation in 2007 that laid the groundwork for the passage of Minnesota's precedent-setting 2008 reform bill.

Now it's time to stand up for affordable health care. The MMA is launching a new initiative this spring called MARCH, which stands for Minnesota Action to Reduce Costs in Healthcare. The initiative's steering committee is being led by the University of Minnesota's Mac Baird, MD, a long-time engaged member, and includes 16 other physician leaders and clinicians.

It is easy to point fingers when we talk about the rising cost of health care both in Minnesota and throughout the country, but the reality is that there is plenty of blame to go around. The MMA’s MARCH effort will look at external drivers of health care costs and also at what physicians can and should do to control those costs. MARCH expects to start its work by focusing on three issues: prescription drug costs, administrative inefficiencies and low-value care.

Share your thoughts, ideas and experiences with the MMA. And stay tuned for updates on how your profession is helping to lead the way in making health care in Minnesota more affordable.