Another essay in the collection addresses persistent gaps in health care delivery because of primary care physician shortages, limited access to care for underserved populations, and suboptimal primary care graduate education. Establishing primary care teaching centers alongside community health centers could expand workforce capacity and recruitment. The Health Care Safety Net in a Post-Reform World provides food for thought for policy makers and providers striving to understand and strengthen the safety net’s post-reform role.

Jessica Bylander

Even after the Affordable Care Act is fully implemented, an estimated twenty million people or more—about 8 percent of the nonelderly population—will remain uninsured. Some will be excluded because they are not legal US citizens, and others will be excluded because coverage will still be too expensive even with the law’s new subsidies. These patients will likely wind up in the health care safety net—a patchwork of publicly funded or community-supported clinics and hospitals that care for these patients. In The Health Care Safety Net in a Post-Reform World, edited by Mark Hall and Sara Rosenbaum, leading health care scholars discuss what roles the safety net can and should play in the wake of reform.

Rosenbaum opens the discussion with an essay on the role of community health centers, which will receive major investments to more than double the size of the federal community health center program—from twenty million patients served in 2009 to fifty million served by 2019. Health centers will be ideal partners for new accountable care organizations and medical home models, particularly in underserved communities, Rosenbaum writes. But there will be challenges ahead: Health centers must strengthen their adult medicine programs, develop new payment systems that reward efficiency rather than volume, and affiliate with other health care delivery systems.

As policy makers on both sides of the aisle continue to build their own narratives about the Affordable Care Act, Lawrence Jacobs and Theda Skocpol offer an objective telling of how the law actually came to be. Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know, originally published in 2010, delves into the political battles around the law’s drafting, reworking, and eventual passage. This revised and expanded edition has been updated to account for three major developments: the impact of the 2010 midterm elections; the US Supreme Court’s 2012 decision that gave states the ability to opt out of the law’s requirement to expand Medicaid; and the ongoing implementation of health reform to date. Jacobs explores these issues further within the pages of Health Affairs, in his and Joel Ario’s December 2012 article, “Post Election, the Affordable Care Act Leaves the Intensive Care Unit for Good.”

Stephen Langel