

Pastor's Column

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What Is the Catholic Position on Health Care Reform?

“For many years, and especially over the last several months, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has advocated for decent, affordable, accessible health care for all. Now the current and much needed national health care dialogue is being buried in an avalanche of ideological combat, misinformation, partisan positioning, and public anger and confusion.

In the middle of this debate the Catholic community has a unique perspective. Our teaching insists health care is a right and shouldn't depend on where your parents work, where you live, or when you got here. Our tradition insists the moral measure of health care reform is how it touches the weak and vulnerable, babies in their mother's womb, and the very sick and old at the end of life, those without access and power. The Catholic community provides health care to millions in our hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes. The Church purchases a lot of health care coverage for our employees in our parishes, schools, charities, and health care institutions. And the Catholic community picks up the pieces of a failing health care system in our emergency rooms, shelters, schools, and parishes. The families and people without health care coverage are not abstractions for us—we see them every day and see how their lives and dignity are threatened.

This is why our strong, clear, and united Catholic voice is needed in the health care debate more than ever. We need to bring our principles and priorities to help get this debate back to basics. It is not right that more than 45 million of our neighbors have no health care coverage. It is wrong, morally wrong. We can and must do better in using the remarkable health care capacity and resources of our nation to serve all our residents. And we should begin with the principle that the purpose of health care reform is to protect and enhance the life and dignity of all.”

—Recent Communiqué (08.14.09) from the USCCB

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB):

- 1. Supports universal health coverage which protects the life and dignity of all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. Because Catholic teaching insists that basic health care is a right and is essential to protect human life and dignity, genuine health care reform which protects human life and advances universal coverage should be truly universal, assuring decent health care for all from conception to natural death.**
- 2. Opposes any efforts to expand abortion funding, mandate abortion coverage, or endanger the conscience rights of health care providers and religious institutions. Longstanding and widely supported current policies on these issues must be preserved. We urge members of the House and Senate to take all steps necessary to oppose abortion funding, mandated abortion coverage, or weakening of conscience rights.**
- 3. Supports effective measures to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children, and all of society by expanding eligibility for public programs, such as Medicaid, to all low-income families and vulnerable people and by offering adequate subsidies for cost-sharing of insurance premiums and out of pocket expenses.**

F. Mike