



HEALTH CARE REFORM

INTRODUCTION

In March 2010, the U.S. Congress enacted the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, followed by enactment of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010. Together these Acts constitute the new federal health care reform provisions (known as the PPACA).

The law phases in new reform measures over the next several years and affects how health care is provided in all sectors. Reforms include alterations on mandated health benefits and coverage provided within private insurance policies, revisions to the Medicaid and Medicare programs, the establishment of state health insurance exchanges for the purchase of health care coverage, and other system-wide reforms.

HEALTH CARE REFORM FROM THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Access to health care for all people has been a policy goal of the U.S. bishops since 1919. In the 1993 resolution, *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*, the U.S. bishops articulated a fundamental principle:

“Health care is more than a commodity; it is a basic human right, an essential safeguard of human life and dignity. We believe our people’s health care should not depend on where they work, how much their parents earn or where they live.”

Throughout the recent debate over federal health reform, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has emphasized several measures as necessary elements of reform:

- Ensure access to quality, affordable, life-giving health care for all;
- Retain longstanding federal requirements that prohibit the funding of abortion and effectively protect conscience rights; and
- Protect access to health care for immigrants.

The USCCB continues to devote its health care reform advocacy efforts to correcting serious moral problems in the PPACA, and the WCC urges all individuals to support the USCCB in these efforts.

WCC POSITIONS

As Wisconsin moves to implement the PPACA at the state level, the WCC urges legislators to consider the following three positions.

Abortion Opt-Out in State Health Care Exchanges. Under the PPACA, each state must establish an American Health Benefit Exchange to facilitate the purchase of health plans by

individuals and small businesses. States must have a design for the operation of these exchanges in place by January 1, 2013, in order to avoid federal intervention in the process. The exchange itself must be operational by January 1, 2014. Lower income individuals will receive assistance from the federal government in covering the costs of participating in a basic coverage exchange plan.

Health insurance plans offering abortion coverage are allowed to participate in these exchanges. However, states may limit such plans from participating in the exchange at the state level. The WCC supports legislation that prohibits the coverage for abortion in Wisconsin's health insurance exchange plans.

Priority Concern for the Poor and Vulnerable. Under the PPACA, states must maintain Medicaid income eligibility levels that were in effect as of March 23, 2010. However, the PPACA also creates several avenues for states to explore how they serve their Medicaid populations. Wisconsin is currently examining reforms to its medical assistance programs for the poor and vulnerable and has already indicated areas where state-supported care may be limited or eliminated. The WCC opposes efforts to limit enrollment in medical assistance programs and the elimination of coverage for the poor and vulnerable.

Pluralism in Health Care. The Church, especially women religious, have a long history of caring for the ill, aged, vulnerable, and dying. Indeed, Catholic hospitals serve one in six patients nationwide. As policy makers at the federal and state levels institute regulations and rules to guide health care reform, it is important to continue to involve quality providers, including religious or faith-based health care systems. The WCC supports reform efforts that encourage religious provider participation and allow these facilities to serve the community without compromising on their moral and ethical directives.

ACTION REQUESTED

When legislators take up proposals to implement health care reform in Wisconsin, urge legislators to:

- Support access to quality, affordable, life-giving health care for all;
- Support legislation that prohibits coverage for abortion in Wisconsin's health insurance exchange plans;
- Retain longstanding federal requirements that prohibit the funding of abortion and effectively protect conscience rights;
- Protect access to health care for immigrants;
- Support quality health care for the poor and vulnerable; and
- Support pluralism in health care, including religious provider participation.

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