

Statement by Bishop Blase Cupich on Health Care Reform

The Catholic Church in the United States has a long history of involvement in health care. It dates back to 1727, when 12 French Ursuline Sisters arrived in New Orleans and became nurses, teachers, and servants of the poor and orphans. This work continues in the present day, as Catholic nonprofit health-care systems and hospitals are present in all 50 States. One out of six patients in our country is cared for in a Catholic hospital. Catholics bring both strong convictions and everyday experience to the issue of health care.

Our healing apostolate is rooted in a belief in the dignity of each human person, realizing, as did Jesus, that one's ability to live a fully human life is greatly affected by health. In a word, we consider health care a basic human right. For this reason, the Catholic bishops have consistently advocated for comprehensive health care reform that leads to health care for all, including the weakest and most vulnerable.

In the present historical moment, the need to reform our system of health care is even more urgent. It is estimated that 46 million people in our country lack basic health care coverage and the cost of health care is becoming prohibitive for many more. We bishops want to support efforts to reform health care in our day and we are encouraging that reform be based on a truly universal policy with respect for human life and dignity. Without proposing a specific plan or one that is either a public or private sector option, we urge that health care reform policies and legislation be crafted in a way that:

1. Provides access for all, with a special concern for the poor and legal immigrants. Reform efforts must begin with the principle that decent health care is not a privilege, but a right and a requirement to protect the life and dignity of every person. All people need and should have access to comprehensive, quality health care, the costs of which must be controlled so that all can afford it. All should be able to receive health care irrespective of their stage of life, where or whether they or their parents work, how much they earn, where they live, or where they were born.
2. Protects the unborn by excluding abortion as part of a mandated national health care benefit and maintains current restrictions on government funding of abortions. The health care reform that is so critically needed will be doomed if the plan compels Americans to pay for the destruction of human life, whether through government funding or mandatory coverage of abortion.
3. Upholds without exception conscience rights, already guaranteed in existing legislation, for health care providers to decline involvement in abortions or abortion referrals. (See www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/crmay08.pdf for a summary of relevant federal legislation.)

I encourage you to participate in the national debate on health care reform and to contact your elected officials to express support for a health care reform plan that reflects these principles.

The present debate on health care reform deserves to be done with civility, mutual respect and candor. Harsh language and deceptive tactics that misrepresent the positions of others undermine

the common good and detract from the important efforts to ensure that all of our brothers and sisters in this land enjoy the right to affordable health care.

Finally, health care reform is not just a task facing the government. It is also about our need to take personal responsibility for our health. Yes, the government must act to reform, but so must we by rejecting personal habits that can threaten our health, such as smoking, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and the neglect of exercise and a proper diet. In the face of powerful pressures in a consumerist society, we should not overlook in this moment of health care reform the need to exercise moderation in a world of abundance. If we say that health care is a right rooted in our belief in human dignity, then we need to respect our own life and dignity by adopting life styles that enhance our health and well-being.

For more information on the Church's involvement in health care and the bishops' advocacy of genuine health care reform, go to <http://www.usccb.org/healthcare>.

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