



# Action Alert!

## Help Reform Health Care

June 2, 2009



**“Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right.**

With an estimated 47 million Americans lacking health care coverage, it is also an urgent national priority. Reform of the nation’s health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations.”

*U.S. Catholic Bishops, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, no. 80 (2007)*



“Our approach to health care is shaped by a simple but fundamental principle: ‘Every person has a right to adequate health care. This right flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that belongs to all human persons, who are made in the image of God.’”

*U.S. Catholic Bishops, A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform: Protecting Human Life, Promoting Human Dignity, Pursuing the Common Good (1993)*



The debate on health care reform is heating up in Congress. The Senate will be considering legislation soon and could vote as early as the end of June on a health care reform bill. The House is writing legislation now and may vote on a bill as early as July. Advocates need to start writing and calling Congress to communicate what is important to include in—and keep out of—health care reform (see the specific asks at the bottom of page 2).

### Catholic Social Teaching and Health Care

In our Catholic tradition, health care is a basic human right. Access to health care should not depend on where a person works, how much a family earns, or where a person lives. Instead, every person, created in the image and likeness of God, has a right to life and to those things necessary to sustain life, including affordable, quality health care. This teaching is rooted in the biblical call to heal the sick and to serve “the least of these,” our concern for human life and dignity, and the principle of the common good. Unfortunately, tens of millions of Americans do not have health insurance. According to the Catholic bishops of the United States, the current health care system is in need of fundamental reform. To learn about Catholic teaching on health care in more detail, read the full statement by the United States Catholic Bishops, *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*, at [uscgb.org/sdwp/national/comphealth.shtml](http://uscgb.org/sdwp/national/comphealth.shtml).

### Facts about the Uninsured

- In 2007, forty-six million Americans were living without health care coverage. Nearly 20 percent of uninsured Americans, or 8.7 million persons, are children.<sup>1</sup>
- Sixty-four percent of the uninsured are employed full-time, year-round.<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated 14,000 persons a day are now losing coverage as a result of the recession.<sup>2</sup>
- The poor are more likely to be uninsured. Thirty-four percent of non-elderly persons below the poverty line are uninsured, compared to 21 percent of non-elderly persons earning two to three times the poverty line.<sup>6</sup>



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## Prayer for the Uninsured

Father of goodness and love, hear our prayers for the uninsured members of our community and for all who are in need.

For those who seek care but find that it is out of reach, may they find consolation in your healing presence.

For all who are blessed with health and security, may they strive to fulfill the needs of those who are sick and insecure.

For leaders who make decisions that affect the health and well-being of others, may they work to ensure the fundamental right to health care.

We ask this through Christ our Lord who healed those who believed. Amen.

## How One Community Responded

In Polk County, FL, 120,000 people or 25 percent of the population are uninsured or underinsured.

Recognizing that access to health care was a major issue in their community, congregations involved in

### **Polk Ecumenical Action Council for**

### **Empowerment, or PEACE**, an organization that

receives funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), decided to take action. When it was announced that the already dwindling funds for healthcare for poor persons were slated to be cut entirely, PEACE joined with

others to advocate for a referendum to institute a half cent sales tax which would be directed toward healthcare for poor persons. Although it was predicted to have little chance of passing, PEACE's work led to support by 62 percent of voters, directing \$26 million a year toward indigent healthcare.

But PEACE's work was not finished. After monitoring the spending, PEACE realized that the money was reaching few people because it was being spent on high-cost specialty care instead of primary care. PEACE engaged in another advocacy campaign and won commitments from the county to open five new primary health clinics in areas of high need. Each clinic will serve up to 40,000 patients a year and will set fees on a sliding scale based on income. The first of the clinics opened in November 2007 and the second is scheduled to open in 2009.



PEACE members celebrate the opening of the Lakeland Primary Care Clinic.

## How You Can Respond

- **Visit the JPHD Resources on Health Care Reform page for:**
  - ⇒ Statement of Bishop William Murphy, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee
  - ⇒ Church teaching on health care reform
  - ⇒ Backgrounder on health care reform
  - ⇒ Prayer and Liturgy resources. Access these resources at: [usccb.org/sdwp/national/health1.shtml](http://usccb.org/sdwp/national/health1.shtml)
- **Partner with a local group funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development** that is working on health care reform. Some PICO-affiliated groups and others will be organizing "Faith and Health Care Sundays" throughout June 2009. You can also consider partnering with a local Catholic Health Association member. Go to [chausa.org](http://chausa.org) and choose "Directories."
- **Call your members of Congress** (find your Representative and Senators at [house.gov](http://house.gov) and [senate.gov](http://senate.gov); Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121) and tell them health care reform should:
  - ⇒ Include health care coverage for all people from conception until natural death, and continue the federal ban on funding for abortions;
  - ⇒ Include access for all with a special concern for the poor;
  - ⇒ Pursue the common good and preserve pluralism, including freedom of conscience; and
  - ⇒ Restrain costs and apply costs equitably among payers.

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