



Action Alert!

Cover the Uninsured Week

March 22-28, 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)

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 usccb.org/sdwp/national/comphealth.shtml.

Facts about the Uninsured

- In 2007, forty-six million Americans were living without health care coverage.¹
- Since the Census Bureau collected 2007 data, the unemployment rate has grown from 4.4 percent to 7.6 percent, resulting in 3.5 million new people who are now uninsured. An estimated 14,000 persons a day are now losing coverage as a result of the recession.²
- Sixty-four percent of the uninsured are employed full-time, year-round.³
- Nearly 20 percent of uninsured Americans, or 8.7 million persons, are children.⁴
- Ethnic minorities make up a disproportionate percentage of the uninsured population.⁵
- 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.⁶

Sources: ^{1,3,4,5} U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; ² Center for American Progress, 2009; ⁶ Employee Benefit Research Institute estimates from the March Current Population Survey, 2007 Supplement.



Cover the Uninsured Week 2009



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

- **Make a commitment to learn more.**
 - ◊ **Learn about the Church's teachings** by reading the U.S. Catholic Bishops' *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*, which can be found at usccb.org/sdwp/national/comphealth.shtml
 - ◊ **Read the recent backgrounder on health care** from the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development at usccb.org/sdwp/projects/backgrounders.shtml.
 - ◊ **Read Catholic Charities USA's materials** on health care and the role health care reform plays in CCUSA's Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America: catholiccharitiesusa.org.
 - ◊ **Read Catholic Health Association's Vision for U.S. Health Care** and access information on hosting community meetings and reaching out to local media: ourhealthcarevalues.org.
 - ◊ **Visit the Cover the Uninsured Week website** for educational resources, local events, and ideas for action as an individual, parish, or community: covertheuninsured.org.
- **Use the Prayer and Liturgy resources** at usccb.org/sdwp/aboutctuw.shtml to engage your parish or community in this issue.
- **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 May 2009. You can also consider partnering with a local Catholic Health Association member. Go to chausa.org and choose "Directories."
- **For more information**, contact Kathy Saile, Director of Domestic Social Development, USCCB, by email: ksaile@usccb.org or phone: 202-541-3134.

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