



Action Alert!

Protect Human Life and Dignity in Health Care Reform
October 9, 2009



“At their core, health care choices are not just political, technical, or economic, but also moral. This legislation is about life and death, who can take their children to the doctor and who cannot, who can afford decent health care coverage and who are left to fend for themselves. Health care reform especially needs to protect those at the beginning of life and at its end, the most vulnerable and the voiceless.”

[Letter to the United States Senate, September 30, 2009](#)

Bishop William F. Murphy
Chairman, Committee on
Domestic Justice and Human
Development

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Chairman, Committee on
Pro-Life Activities

Bishop John Wester
Chairman, Committee on
Migration

Brief Update: The House and Senate committees have completed their work on health care reform bills. It is essential that the legislation clearly apply to this new program longstanding and widely supported federal restrictions on abortion funding and mandates, and protections for rights of conscience. No current bill meets this test. The full Senate anticipates voting on a health care bill the week of October 19. The House is expected to vote on a health care reform bill shortly after the Senate votes on a bill. If both chambers pass a bill, they will contain different provisions and policies. The House and Senate will then meet to work out the differences and bring the same bill to each chamber for a final vote.

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 those things necessary to sustain life, including affordable, quality health care. Health care should be available to everyone from the moment of conception until natural death. This reflects the 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, the current health care system is in need of genuine reform. To learn about Catholic teaching on health care in more detail, find parish resources, and read letters sent to visit www.usccb.org/healthcare.

How You Can Respond

Call Congress now (find your Representative and Senators at house.gov and senate.gov; Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121) and tell them health care reform should respect the life and dignity of all people. Specifically:

1. Exclude mandated coverage for abortion, and incorporate longstanding policies against abortion funding and in favor of conscience rights. No one should be required to pay for or participate in abortion. No current bill meets this test.

For SENATE: “During floor debate on the health care reform bill, please support a floor amendment to incorporate longstanding policies against abortion funding and in favor of conscience rights. The final bill should be opposed until these serious concerns are addressed.”

For HOUSE: “Support the Stupak Amendment that addresses pro-life concerns on abortion funding and conscience rights and a Rule on the health care bill that allows Members to vote on the amendment. If these serious concerns are not fixed, the final bill should be opposed until they are addressed.”

2. Adopt measures that protect and improve people’s health care. Reform should make quality health care affordable and accessible to everyone, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable.
3. Include effective measures to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children and all of society. Ensure that legal immigrants and their family members have comprehensive, affordable, and timely access to health care coverage. Maintain an adequate safety net for those who remain uncovered.



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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 Your Community Can Respond

- **Plan a prayer service** or special Mass for health care reform and health care providers.
- **Host a speaker or hold a workshop** or study group on the Catholic position on healthcare reform.
- **Write a letter to the editor** of your local newspaper.
- **Bring copies of this action alert** to a community gathering and invite everyone to respond.
- **Partner with local groups in your community** to advocate for health care reform that reflects Catholic values. Visit www.chausa.org (choose "Directories") or www.catholiccharitiesusa.org (choose "Get Help") to find out what's happening locally.
- **Visit the USCCB Health Care Reform page** for statements, Church teaching, backgrounders, and prayer and liturgy resources: www.usccb.org/healthcare/



Facts about Catholic Health Care Ministry

- The **first Catholic hospital** in the United States was established by the Ursuline sisters in 1728.
- During the Civil War, Catholic sisters served as the **first naval nurses**.
- The **first hospice** in the United States, St. Rose's Free Home for Incurable Cancer, was established in 1900.
- Catholic health care systems and facilities are currently **present in all fifty states**, providing effective care and other services including hospice, home health, assisted living and senior housing.
- With 624 Catholic hospitals and 499 long-term care nursing facilities, **the Catholic Church is one of the largest providers of health care in the United States**. Every year, Catholic health care facilities see more than 16.9 million emergency room visits, more than 92.7 million outpatient visits, and 5.5 million admissions.

Sources: Catholic Health Association, www.catholichealthcare.us and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org/healthcare

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