



## Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

### **ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE (Medicaid expansion)** **February 2013**

#### **ISSUE**

The Catholic tradition affirms that health care is a basic right flowing from the sanctity and dignity of human life. Millions of Americans continue to go without health care coverage in our nation. Over 48 million people lack health insurance. As provisions of the Affordable Care Act are implemented the uninsured rate has dropped some. The provision to expand Medicaid in the Affordable Care Act is expected to have the one of largest impacts on reducing the number of insured along with the creation of the health insurance exchanges. Although the law mandated that states expand their Medicaid coverage to most people living at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty level, the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2012 removed the *mandated* expansion and gave states the *option* of expanding eligibility for their Medicaid programs.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Catholic teaching supports adequate and affordable health care for all, because health care is a basic human right. Health care policy must protect human life and dignity, not threaten them, especially for the most voiceless and vulnerable. Health care laws must respect the consciences of providers, taxpayers, and others, not violate them. Coverage should be truly universal and should not be denied to those in need because of their condition, age, where they come from or when they arrive here. Providing affordable and accessible health care that clearly reflects these fundamental principles is a public good and moral imperative.

#### **USCCB POSITION**

For decades, the bishops have consistently insisted that access to decent health care is a basic safeguard of human life and an affirmation of human dignity from conception until natural death. They have advocated that health care reform legislation should 1) ensure access to quality, affordable, life giving health care for all; 2) retain longstanding requirements that federal funds not be used for elective abortions or plans that include them, and effectively protects conscience rights; and 3) protect the access to health care that immigrants currently have and remove current barriers to access.

In November 2009, the USCCB wrote in a letter to the U.S. Senate, “The bishops support the expansion of Medicaid eligibility for people living at 133 percent or lower of the federal poverty level. The bill does not burden states with excessive Medicaid matching rates. The affordability credits will help lower-income families purchase insurance coverage through the Health Insurance Exchange.”

Although not included in the Affordable Care Act, the USCCB continues to support policy repealing the five-year ban on legal immigrants accessing federal health benefit programs, such as Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program. Legal immigrants, who work and pay taxes, should have access to such programs if needed. Removing the ban would help ensure that legal immigrants have access to health care. (Note: States currently have the option to cover some immigrant pregnant women and children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.)

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Advocates are urged to work with state Catholic conferences and state officials to consider Medicaid expansion with prudence, concern for human life and dignity and a commitment to the common good. It is an effective policy to help assure that all people have access to health care.

#### **For more information**

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