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A Guide to

The Health Care Reform Debate

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Congress is working to pass comprehensive health care reform legislation in 2009. How will people of faith participate in this fast-moving public debate? This handout provides an initial resource for people of faith to engage in the health care debate in a constructive way, based on faith values.



A biblical promise of health and healing»

According to the Institute of Medicine, 18,000 people in our nation still die each year unnecessarily because they lack affordable health coverage. Scripture does not outline specific public policies around the provision of health care, but it does depict that protecting the health of each person is an important personal and communal responsibility for people of faith.

- Good health is God's will for every person created in the divine image.
- In both the Old and New Testament, the word salvation includes physical wholeness.
- The entire Bible is an ongoing progression toward God's new world where God will "wipe away every tear from their eye... Mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Rev. 21:4) and "No more shall there be... an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime (Isaiah 65:20)."
- Jesus and his disciples demonstrate that sharing the good news and healing the sick are bound up together (Luke 9:6, Mark 7:32-35).
- Physical healing was a part of the salvation Jesus brought, as illustrated by the use of the word saved (sovo) throughout the Gospels to refer to physical healing. Healings represent a sign of the in breaking of God's kingdom into the present reality.

As Christians, we are called to participate in God's new creation as instruments of healing and redemption. By assuring that every family has access to health care, we affirm the dignity of each human, enabling people to regain their health, and enjoy the dignity of productive work.

Current health care reality for families and the nation »

For those with high quality health coverage, the United States offers some of the best, most advanced treatment in the world. Yet, our system is inefficient and costly. Economists estimate that as much as one-third of all health care spending does not improve health. Costs are rising so fast that health care threatens to crowd out other necessities. Most agree that we need more emphasis on prevention and primary care, and that many families (even those with coverage) are not getting the care they need to stay healthy.

Since World War II, most Americans have received health insurance through their employers. But this system is under stress from rising costs and global competition: employees have to pay high premiums, deductibles and co-payments, and many businesses have eliminated health benefits entirely. Low-wage workers have little chance of obtaining affordable coverage for their families.

A values-based, common sense approach to health care reform »

People of faith may never agree on every aspect of health care reform, but there are guiding principles on which there is broad agreement within the faith community.

- 1. Affordability:** Health care must be affordable for all families. Reform must include limits on out-of-pocket expenses in proportion to income and guarantees comprehensive benefits sufficient to maintain and promote good health.
- 2. Coverage:** Health care reform must cover all Americans.
- 3. Stewardship:** The cost of reform must be broadly shared and placed on a sustainable funding foundation.
- 4. Protecting the poor:** Lower-income children and families must be protected.
- 5. Religious liberty:** Reform legislation must respect religious liberty and the values of health care providers.

Understanding the Plans for Reform »

There are many ideas for transforming health care in the America. Here are three major principles being debated in Congress that are especially important to families:

1. People who have coverage they like can keep it. Everyone would have a choice to purchase private health insurance, or possibly choose a quality public insurance option.
2. People who are uninsured or lose their coverage would have a guaranteed ability to purchase affordable coverage through income subsidies. No one could be denied coverage or discriminated against by insurers because they are sick or have pre-existing conditions.
3. Long-term health care costs would be reduced by both covering everyone and by creating stronger incentives for preventing illness and improving the quality of care.

What you can do to influence the debate »

- Pray on this issue and discuss personal experiences about health care with your friends and neighbors.
- Educate yourself. Don't believe everything you read in e-mails or see on TV.
- Organize a Health Care Sabbath or Health Care Café in your congregation to give people a chance to share their stories, discuss the issues raised by health care reform and plan ways your congregation can act together.
- Invite your Members of Congress to visit your congregation to discuss health care and its importance to the faith community.
- Share your views with Congress. Call PICO's toll-free line: (866) 279-5474 to hear a short update on the debate and then be connected to the offices of your Senators and Congressperson.

For more information please visit www.coverallfamilies.org



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