



# OUR VISION FOR U.S. HEALTH CARE

*Support and enthusiasm for major health system change is growing dramatically among both the public and elected officials. As the U.S. moves toward another national election cycle, the topic of health care will only continue to intensify as a top-tier issue for voters.*

THE U.S. HAS THE ABILITY – AND, MANY ARGUE, THE *RESPONSIBILITY* – TO ASSURE THAT THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WORKS FOR EVERYONE. AS THE HEALTH REFORM DIALOGUE ADVANCES, SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT WILL REQUIRE CLOSE AND CAREFUL ATTENTION INCLUDE THESE:

- + 46 million people in the U.S. lack health insurance coverage of any kind – that is one in every seven people, or the combined population of 24 states.
- + Among those without adequate health insurance are some of the most vulnerable. Some nine million children, for instance, are uninsured even though most live in a home where at least one parent works.
- + Most people who cannot afford health coverage are employed; in fact, 8 of 10 are in working families.
- + Employer-sponsored health insurance coverage is waning: the share of U.S. firms offering health benefits to their workers fell from 69 percent in 2000 to 60 percent in 2005. Among businesses with three to nine workers, the share fell from 58 percent to 47 percent.
- + 18,000 people in the U.S. die each year because they do not have health coverage and miss the medical services they need. That is 49 people per day.



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*In all of the world's major industrialized countries, except the United States, everyone is guaranteed access to health care. With its plentiful resources and optimistic spirit, this nation can certainly do the same. The principles that follow provide a tool with which to begin evaluating health reform proposals that surface in states or at the federal level. These principles are also meant to contribute to the national dialogue on health care reform and transformation.*

**THE VISION** || The Catholic Health Association envisions a just health care system that provides access for everyone, is equitably and rationally financed and is designed to promote quality and innovation. Because all persons are sisters and brothers to one another, we believe that the health care system should be available and accessible to everyone, without exception, and ensure that persons who are poor and vulnerable are never left on its margins. According to Catholic social teaching and the tenets of other faith traditions, every person has the right to realize the fullness of his or her dignity. The ability of individuals to access health care lies at the core of their ability to realize their dignity and live healthy, productive lives. Threats to any of us amount to a threat to the broader community – and to our common good. The common good includes education, employment, a stable economy, a safe environment and domestic peace among other elements. Health care and its reform should not be treated in isolation from this larger context of the social good, and health care should be organized as a true system that is integrated to promote the nation's health.

All those who benefit from and work within a society share in the responsibility of maintaining and sustaining its health care system. In the health care system CHA envisions, patients and their families participate actively in a care process that pays attention to body, mind and spirit, and every person assumes a proper responsibility for his or her own health and wellness. In this health care system, services are delivered safely and compassionately and always with the goal of improving the health status of individuals and the community.

**THE VALUES** || Several foundational Catholic values guide this vision and underlie the health reform principles that follow. The Catholic health ministry's insistence on a system that leaves no one behind flows from the fundamental value of human dignity in community. In accordance with protecting the inherent dignity of every person, the health care system must, first and foremost, be organized to cover everyone. In doing so, the system should promote justice as it works to serve the common good, properly steward resources, and deliver the best possible care.

Health care also impacts directly the widely held American value of opportunity. Those who do not have health care coverage are unfairly limited in their opportunity. When you are unhealthy, it is difficult to be productive at school, at work, and difficult as well to participate in civic activity and contribute to the nation's economy – all critical for a fully functioning and growing society. Ultimately, the equitable and just distribution of health care is inseparable from the broadly shared goal of healthy communities and the realization of the best of our human potential. Thus, health care is not a commodity but is fundamental to a healthy, flourishing society. Healthy communities depend on healthy individuals and families. A strong nation and a strong society depend on both.

**THE PRINCIPLES** || The United States has a moral obligation to ensure that no one goes without any of life's basic necessities, including health care. Accordingly, we believe that a reformed health care system addressing the needs of the body, mind and spirit must abide by the following principles and essential elements:

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**The health care system we envision will be available and accessible to everyone.** *Accordingly, it should:*

- + Provide a basic health benefit package to everyone that includes services across the life span of care – preventive, primary, acute, long-term and end-of-life.
- + Never limit access to health care coverage based on one's age, health status, employment status or financial means.

**The health care system we envision will pay special attention to the duty of protecting the poor and vulnerable.**

*Accordingly, it should:*

- + Address the particular needs of poor, immigrant and elderly populations; collectively assume responsibility for providing care to those who cannot help themselves, including persons who are not competent, by involving government, charitable organizations and health care providers.
- + Provide the same quality of care for everyone, not varying on the basis of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity or any other factor.

**The health care system we envision will be health- and prevention-oriented, with the goal of creating healthy U.S. communities.** *Accordingly, it should:*

- + Emphasize and make available to persons in every community primary and preventive care as well as chronic disease management.
- + Make readily available information on the prevalence of major health conditions so that proper steps can be taken to identify root causes and prevent these conditions.

**The health care system we envision will be sufficiently and fairly financed.** *Accordingly, it should:*

- + Share among all stakeholders the responsibility of financing the health care system; fairly and equitably distribute the financial burden of providing essential health care services to every person among all members of society, not unjustly allocating that burden to any selected element including employers, providers and individuals.
- + Finance the government's share of health care through a system of progressive taxation.

**The health care system we envision will allocate resources in ways that are transparent and participative.**

*Accordingly, it should:*

- + Promote the efficient and cost-effective use of facilities, equipment and services while minimizing unnecessary administrative expenses; be highly efficient, avoiding waste or mismanagement of financial, material and human resources.
- + Not spend resources on care that medical judgment determines to be futile.

**The health care system we envision will put patients and families at the center of the care process.**

*Accordingly, it should:*

- + Respect the uniqueness of all persons by considering their physical, psychological and spiritual needs; ensure that the needs, values and preferences of patients are the primary consideration in decisions about care and treatment.
- + Thoughtfully design end-of-life and palliative care to ensure the best possible treatment protocols for these vulnerable populations.

**The health care system we envision will deliver care safely and effectively.** *Accordingly, it should:*

- + Standardize the use of information technology throughout the health care system to improve clinical coordination and reduce medical errors.
- + Expand evidence-based medicine to improve safety and continually improve outcomes; prioritize patient safety by minimizing the systemic causes of errors.

**The health care system we envision will respect the role of religiously affiliated health care organizations.**

*Accordingly, it should:*

- + Protect the free exercise of ethical and religious beliefs; ensure that providers of health care services are not required to perform acts or procedures that infringe on their religious beliefs.
  - + Reject public financing for procedures prohibited by the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, including abortion and euthanasia.
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