



Briefing

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EDITOR

A two-year-old receives life-preserving immunization at a "wellness bus" visiting his public housing community in Tampa.

- In Dayton, OH, an elderly woman finds companionship at a day care center for seniors and a man receives care in his home.

- Residents of inner-city Detroit and rural Kansas go to newly established primary care clinics in their areas.

All these people have been touched by the Catholic healing ministry. I use the term "healing" instead of "healthcare" because "healing" is such a powerful word. It stresses that the ministry encompasses an unbounded spectrum of activities beyond acute care services provided in hospitals.

Of course, such efforts are not new. Since the earliest days of the Catholic health ministry, sisters and brothers have gone into communities to respond to particular needs. Since the Middle Ages—first in Europe and then in North America—they have served the poor, orphans, victims of smallpox and cholera, the mentally ill.

What is especially exciting today is the increasing collaboration between Catholic healthcare organizations and others in the community. The Catholic Health Association has supported community activities through its 1989 *Social Accountability Budget: A Process for Planning and Reporting Community Service in a Time of Fiscal Constraint*, which helps healthcare organizations quantify and develop community benefit activities, and its 1993 *Social Accountability Program*, developed with the

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American Association of Homes for the Aging, for organizations that provide care and services for the elderly. CHA's 1992 Standards for Community Benefit (see p. 51) encourage facilities to find creative ways to improve the health of the people in their communities. They buttress CHA's call in its 1988 document *A Time to Be Old, a Time to Flourish* for institutions to lead in ensuring that the aging have access to a range of services in the community.

Activities that improve the health status of communities help Catholic organizations fulfill their mission of service and demonstrate why their tax exemption is warranted. And making people in our communities healthier is key to the success of a reformed American healthcare system that focuses on preventing illness and delivering care at the most appropriate sites.

In this special issue on community benefits, our goal is to give you a wide-angle picture of the Catholic healing ministry's response to community need. Articles are truly packed with practical case studies, ideas for collaborating with other organizations, methods for assessing the needs in your own community, and ways to use CHA's community benefit standards to elicit community feedback on your performance.

Looking ahead toward what promises to be a challenging year for healthcare reform, we know that organizations which actively and visibly reach out to improve the health of the people they serve will gain widespread community support to survive and continue Catholic healthcare's tradition of service.