

CHA's Advocacy Efforts

Challenging the Status Quo And Promoting Change

LISA SMITH, MPA

As a vital ministry of the church, Catholic health care has long been called to bring healing and hope—to provide care for patients and communities as well as to advocate for the changes needed in our society to protect human dignity and promote the common good. We believe every person is created in the image of God, that each life is sacred and possesses inalienable worth, and that access to health care is essential to protecting the inherent dignity of every individual.

Even as we continue to provide health care and assistance for patients, friends and neighbors, it is just as important to address the problem of lack of access to care and other obstacles to maintaining healthy communities. These include the affordability of health coverage; housing and food insecurity; cycles of poverty caused by inadequate education, work training and affordable child care; the particular challenges faced by refugees and undocumented immigrants and their families; and the environmental hazards that are sickening our planet and its people. Caring for those who suffer from these ills will always be a hallmark of Catholic health care, but we should equally be advocating for the changes needed to address these root causes of poor health and broken communities.

This is an enormous challenge, but fortunately the Catholic Health Association has many resources and allies in this work. Above all, our health ministry is able to draw upon a rich history of social thought and action within the Catholic Church. That tradition is shared with our partners at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA, with whom we work in advocating for a more just and equitable society. CHA also has a tremendous resource in our members, whose passion and expertise inform and guide our efforts. Our *Vision for U.S. Health*

Care, crafted in collaboration with advocacy leaders throughout the health ministry, establishes the foundational principles for a health care system that truly serves everyone in our nation. With the *Vision* as a guide, CHA works together with the membership and with the guidance of our Board of Trustees to develop a biannual advocacy agenda and public policy priorities coinciding with each new Congress. CHA's advocacy agenda is rooted in the same core values as our *Vision for U.S. Health Care* — human dignity, common good, concern for people who are poor and vulnerable, stewardship, justice and pluralism—and enables the Catholic health ministry to speak with a united voice on key policy issues. Our current advocacy

Caring for those who suffer ... will always be a hallmark of Catholic health care, but we should equally be advocating for the changes needed to address these root causes of poor health and broken communities.



agenda focuses on five issue areas: 1) ensuring access and coverage for everyone; 2) maintaining a strong safety net; 3) strengthening services in aging and chronic care; 4) protecting life and ensuring conscience protection; and 5) improving the health and well-being of communities.

In order to be as effective as possible, CHA also identifies areas where we can lead the ministry by framing the dialog around such issues as health care for everyone, building healthy communities through community benefit programs, and protecting and enhancing the Medicaid program. We also identify areas where we can add our voice and partner with others to advocate good public policy. Finally, we identify issues we will need to monitor for potential opportunities to work with Congress or the Administration in order to further our priorities.

The success of our advocacy efforts wholly depends on the ministry working together with a united voice on key issues. The strength of that voice is reinforced by direct engagement with members of Congress. Catholic health care is a trusted voice, an established provider of compassionate and quality care and a valuable community partner. Our reputation and tradition provide excellent opportunities to serve as a voice for the voiceless in advocating improved systems of care and coverage to uphold human dignity and the common good.

Members of Congress are receptive to our issues because of our reputation and because our concerns cross the political divide at a time of unfortunate and ever-increasing partisanship. Engaging with your representative or senators, expressing concern or support for proposed policies, and providing examples of what their impact would be on patients and communities or the ability to provide care are important in influencing members of Congress. There are different levels of engagement that range from messages or calls to congressional offices to in-person meetings in Washington or in district or state offices, all of which have impact. Whether meeting or corresponding with a member of Congress or with their staffers, that engagement is key to building relationships with congressional offices and pro-

viding valuable perspective for those making laws and setting public policy. We have seen many successes arising from our collective efforts over the years, from passage of the Affordable Care Act and protection of the law from repeal efforts to the 10-year funding extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program; passage of major men-

Advocacy is everyone's responsibility. Everyone in the ministry, no matter where you live or what your job is, can help bring about the real changes that will improve our nation's health and health care system.

tal health and substance use disorder-opioid legislation; and continuing efforts to raise awareness of the importance of palliative care and the 340B prescription drug discount program.

Advocacy is everyone's responsibility. Everyone in the ministry, no matter where you live or what your job is, can help bring about the real changes that will improve our nation's health and health care system. I urge you to visit the advocacy page on CHA's website to find out more about these efforts and explore the many resources we provide to engage everyone in advocacy. Download and share our *Vision* and the current Advocacy Agenda with your lawmakers; utilize our background information and policy analyses to help inform your advocacy work; and take advantage of the many outlets to inform and engage the Catholic health ministry, including receiving weekly updates on legislative developments, participating in monthly advocacy calls and using our grassroots e-Advocacy program that is housed on our website and updated regularly. CHA's advocacy and public policy team is always available to help you in getting started with advocacy work or build upon the work you are already doing. Together, we can help make our *Vision for U.S. Health Care* a reality.

LISA SMITH is vice president, advocacy and public policy, the Catholic Health Association, Washington, D.C.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, March - April 2020
Copyright © 2020 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
