

# Keeping the Vision Alive for Health Care Reform



**BY JEFF TIEMAN**  
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**C**HA's *Our Vision For U.S. Health Care* has been a big hit. People from around the ministry — and, increasingly, outside of it — are requesting and promoting the document, which names values and principles that should guide future reform efforts.

As we take the next steps toward a health care system that works for everyone, the *Vision* can and should remain a centerpiece of the national conversation. And each professional in our ministry — from multi-hospital CEOs to charge nurses and billing clerks — has a role to play. Each of us has a voice that must be heard, a viewpoint on what is most important as work proceeds to repair our health care system.

One of the most encouraging things we are hearing at CHA is that hospital leaders are sharing the *Vision* document with their board members. Members of Catholic hospital boards, who are business and civic leaders in their communities, can make a significant difference by sharing the *Vision* with others. Also, they can speak publicly about it and encourage their various constituencies to demand real action.

We have a window of opportunity now, the first legitimate chance in more than a decade to engage our national leadership in a conversation about health care. With public interest in this issue growing by the day, people want to discuss their hopes and expectations. They want to know what candidates for office would do to address the quality, cost and access challenges that face us. They want a voice in how we meet those challenges together.

Copies of *Our Vision for U.S. Health Care* were mailed with the March-April issue of *Health Progress*. To request additional copies, visit the CHA website at [www.chausa.org/coveringanation](http://www.chausa.org/coveringanation).

The power of the *Vision* statement, which represents a collective effort by CHA and our membership, is that it takes a step back and comes from the position that health care reform should be rooted in shared values. It is more than an economic or practical matter. Instead of developing a policy proposal, the *Vision* sets parameters for reform and provides a way to move forward through dialogue instead of debate — principles now, policies later.

As a nation, we must come to consensus about the priorities of a reformed system, and determine together what we expect our health system to be in the future. With a shared notion of our ultimate goals, we should be able to move through the policy discussion more easily. The starting point should be the premise with which the vast majority of Americans agree: the U.S. health care system must be available and accessible to everyone.

If we agree on the fundamental concept of universality, we can then proceed to the specifics that might get us there. Regardless of how well the dialogue proceeds, however, there is no shortage of obstacles.

First among these obstacles is the economy. It will be difficult, at best, to keep health care reform at the front of the line when a new administration takes office. With the economy arguably drifting closer to a recession, it will no doubt be viewed as a major priority before and after the November presidential election.

In an ideal world, we might attempt to work on health care and the economy simultaneously. In reality, the economy is likely to trump health care, especially if concerns continue to build that a recession is looming — or already here.

Then, the usual obstacles exist in the health care reform arena: partisan differences, funding difficulties and industry infighting.

With these obstacles and others in front of us, Catholic health care must keep the focus squarely



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on the need for reform. Our role in this ongoing dialogue can and should be to say — early and often — that we will not relent or stop working or advocating until the principles outlined in our *Vision* statement are met.

All of us in the Catholic health ministry can help keep health care reform front and center. We can remind our communities, elected leaders and candidates for public office that this issue must not be swept aside or forsaken as other important matters are addressed.

We can and must make the most of the unique opportunity before us. At CHA, we hope the *Vision* statement will help advance and focus this critical conversation. And that each of you in the Catholic health ministry will speak up for the health care system we know is possible. ■



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