

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL SOLIDARITY THROUGH DISCERNMENT, DIALOGUE AND DIRECTION

Catholic healthcare in the United States is inseparably linked to global health. As global interconnectedness grows, many might point to the importance of health security, resilient systems that protect against pandemics and other widespread health threats, at home and globally. CHA and other organizations have also conducted extensive analysis and education to explore the ethical implications of how the U.S. employs an increasing share of its health workforce from low- and middle-income countries to care for patients in ministry facilities.¹



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These realities demand honest reflection about our role in global health. If we fail to engage globally with intention and solidarity, today's funding shifts will devastate the very health systems that educate and train much of our workforce.² More than anything, this moment reveals a simple truth we can no longer ignore: Global health is local health.

As we navigate rapid shifts in U.S. global health policy, widening geopolitical instability, and an increasing need for access to care worldwide, we are called to a renewed commitment to our Gospel mission and our role as part of the Church.

Discernment:

Remembering Why We Are Called to This Work

CHA members and the broader faith-based community understand the importance of service, especially to those who are most in need. This is not an optional dimension of our identity — it is at the heart of who we are and the legacy of the Catholic health ministry's founding congregations.

Catholic healthcare in the U.S. exists today because missionaries from Europe and beyond came to these shores in the 18th, 19th and early 20th cen-

turies. Their global outreach, rooted in courage, faith and solidarity, gave birth to our hospitals, schools and social services. While they, like us, were not perfect, Catholic ministries stand on the shoulders of those women and men who crossed oceans, often at great risk. A series of gatherings in Rome this spring reinforced my commitment to ensuring we continue the tradition of global solidarity that those priests, sisters and brothers lived through their actions.

The Pontifical Academy for Life's conference "Healthcare for All: Sustainability and Equity," the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development's "Committed to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Healthcare Facilities" convening, and additional conversations at the Dicastery brought the realities of a divided and hurting world into sharper focus. These discussions also served as a reminder that the global community continues to rely on Catholic healthcare as a consistent and reliable partner, even when conventional service providers and systems fail.

Dialogue:

How Shared Understanding Strengthens Our Mission

Through decades of dialogue, shared learning and collaboration, CHA members have refined programs, expanded reach, improved efficiency and deepened impact across the country.

Yet the changing dynamics with religious congregations, particularly the decline in vocations, have altered the landscape of the Church's global outreach. Geopolitical shifts — including cuts to aid, changing priorities and ongoing wars — threaten to reverse long- and short-term global health gains. Many international health systems are facing critical shortages of personnel, supplies and lifesaving equipment. The shortages are especially acute in rural areas, where faith-based and Catholic facilities are often the only option for communities and where our brothers and sisters are among the poorest and most vulnerable.

These realities were underscored during the Dicastery's WASH convening in Rome, where Catholic, ecumenical, interfaith and secular partners gathered. The conversations revealed both the scale of unmet need and the depth of existing Catholic leadership already engaged in strengthening health systems through foundational interventions such as WASH. For example, while improvements have been made to 87 of the 150 facilities in the Dicastery's WASH initiative, the remaining 63 still require support.

What emerged from the discussions was that no single system, congregation or organization can meet these challenges alone. Progress depends on intentional dialogue, shared learning and coordination across Catholic health systems, global implementers, researchers and Church partners. These challenges demand renewed dialogue within the U.S., as global and domestic organizations discern how best to respond.

Direction: Building Resilient Health Systems

The Church's messages at the Pontifical Academy for Life and WASH in healthcare facilities gatherings were aligned and clear: Healthcare cannot be a privilege. It is a moral imperative.

If we are to meet this moment faithfully, Catholic healthcare must recognize that global health is deeply connected to local health. The clinicians and technicians trained abroad, who now fill workforce shortages in U.S. hospitals, represent an investment that low- and middle-income countries have made in us. That investment must be valued and considered appropriately as part of global health, which is truly a two-way street.

What is needed today is a paradigm shift that will lead us to a global health strategy rooted in sustainability and accountability:

- Scale up today so communities can scale

down dependence tomorrow.

- Shift from an aid mentality to a mutually beneficial partnership mentality.

- Strengthen local capacity, leadership and self-reliance.

- Encourage system change, not individual projects.

The Rome discussions also highlighted that sustainable global health engagements require stronger alignment between operational experience and evidence generation. Partners repeatedly emphasized the need for more structured opportunities to document what works, identify where gaps persist, and collectively accelerate progress. Areas such as WASH in healthcare facilities, supply chain resilience and the mobility of the global health workforce offer opportunities not only for implementation but also for shared research, learning and advocacy, thereby strengthening both local impact and global influence.

What Doing More Looks Like

At times like these, shared discernment and dialogue are not luxuries. They are necessary tools for strategic action. It is from such shared discernment that sustainable strategies can take root:

1. Think beyond individual systems:

To achieve an impact greater than the sum of our parts, global Catholic health ministries must pursue strategic alliances that allow for shared problem-solving, collaborative investment in workforce development, and coordinated action.

2. Reimagine care through partnership:

By working collaboratively across CHA systems and in partnership with the local Church, communities and governments, we can reimagine how health services are delivered and sustained.

3. Prioritize catalytic interventions:

Efforts such as rebuilding the global health workforce, building resilient supply chains for medical equipment and essential supplies, or securing WASH for health facilities can trigger systemwide strengthening.

Experiences shared in Rome demonstrated how collaboration across Catholic systems and global partners can reduce duplication and increase impact. Through joint investment in

WASH infrastructure, coordinated technical assistance, or shared engagement with the Vatican and multilateral partners, collective action allows ministries to leverage scale while remaining rooted in local accompaniment.

At the WASH meeting, CHA's President and CEO Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM, noted that CHA's role as a trusted convener positions it to help members explore collaborative models to be United for Change in healthcare, part of the organization's strategic plan. Collaboration can identify strategic entry points and allow for discernment where shared action can lead to systemwide strengthening rather than isolated gains. These interventions are not only possible but also urgently needed.

A Shared Path Forward

The recent conversations, coupled with the feedback we continue to receive through our U.S. global health policy reflections and survey, reaffirm that Catholic healthcare has both the opportunity and the responsibility to lead boldly.

CHA looks forward to engaging with Catholic healthcare and partners as we forge a path to im-

prove health and well-being for all.

Your perspective is essential as we discern the future of Catholic global health engagement. We invite you into deeper dialogue as we seek to learn about opportunities, barriers, hopes and the commitments required for genuine transformation.

Let's continue this work together and schedule a conversation to explore your role, your system's role and how we might do more — together and for the right reasons. Contact Bruce Compton at bcompton@chausa.org.

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NOTES

1. "The Future of Health Workforce-2025 Edition," Catholic Health Association, <https://www.chausa.org/focus-areas/global-health/resources/resource/future-of-health-workforce>.
2. Vibhu Mishra, "Global Health Systems 'At Risk' as Funding Cuts Bite, Warns WHO," United Nations, February 2, 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166869>.

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