

Catholic Church Statement on Health Care

(Letter to Congress Providing Moral Principles to Consider While Providing for Health Care During COVID-19 Pandemic May 7, 2020)

Dear Senator/Representative:

Thank you for your ongoing work and your leadership in addressing the COVID-19 crisis in this extraordinary time. For the Catholic Church, health care is both a human right and a demand of the common good: the dignity of the human person makes a claim of justice on access to health care, and health is a societal good that can only be attained by working together. As is even more clear in a pandemic, the exclusion of some from health care threatens the health of all, and we write to you to bring to your attention some of our concerns.

Health care access for everyone is critical, but in the midst of a global health crisis such as the one we are currently experiencing, we are most concerned for the poor, uninsured, unemployed, and vulnerable populations, including immigrants and refugees. Upholding the dignity of the person and the common good demand policies that fully affirm *all* human life.

In light of these considerations, we ask you to keep in mind the following longstanding moral principles as you discern how to address present health care needs:

1. Respect for life and dignity: Because each human life is a uniquely precious gift from God, every person should have access to lifesaving health care. The destruction of human life through abortion is not a form of health care, and taxpayers should not be compelled to fund health care plans that cover it. Any effort to fund insurance coverage for abortion violates the dignity and protection of human life at this critical moment. Moreover, a good and just stewardship of medical resources must not categorically exclude people based on ability, insurance coverage, age, detention status, financial resources, race, ethnicity, or immigration status. In other words, the dignity of each and every person, and the demands of the common good, mean that health care should be accessible to all.

Racial inequities in health care, which existed in many forms before this crisis, are manifesting in very disturbing disproportionate infections and deaths in patients of color with the COVID-19 virus. We hope you will work to find ways to address this serious problem.

2. Honoring conscience rights: The conscience rights of all participants in health care should be respected.

3. Truly affordable: In a very short period of time, many people have abruptly lost their jobs as a result of the economic impact of the COVID-19 virus. Many will not be eligible for Medicaid and will find private insurance unaffordable. If Medicaid is expanded, additional resources for health care providers and states must be considered to avoid financial strain on the health care and social service system. Even those with some form of public or private insurance will need to be assured that pursuing medical treatment for the coronavirus—which will benefit their entire community will not financially cripple them and their families in this moment of economic uncertainty and insecurity.

4. Comprehensive and high quality: Limited access to minimal health care, particularly for poor and vulnerable people, including the undocumented, is not enough. Access provided through federal health care policies needs to be sufficient to maintain and promote good health as well as treat disease.

The Catholic Church in the United States remains committed to the accessibility of affordable health care for everyone. Health care is an essential aspect of the Church's presence and ongoing ministry. Our hope and prayer is that these perspectives will guide you in your consideration of the appropriate steps to take to address the health care needs of the crisis.

Sincerely, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Bishop George V. Murry, Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville