

Human Dignity and Missouri's Medicaid Decision

Missouri Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Missouri Catholic Bishops



“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

-Mt 25:40

Right now Missouri legislators have an opportunity to restructure Medicaid so that our poorest citizens have access to affordable health care. The Missouri Catholic Conference supports both reform and expansion of Medicaid. Catholic citizens can play an important role in ensuring that Missouri moves forward with Medicaid legislation.

The Current Challenge

Too many working adults and parents have no health insurance. In Missouri Medicaid is offered to parents with annual incomes of no more than 18% of the federal poverty level. A mother with two children with an income just over \$3,612 a year does not qualify for Medicaid. In many cases, this mother will also not qualify for premium subsidies to purchase private health plans on the newly created insurance exchanges.

Who are these people? They are your neighbors — the cashier at the grocery store, the person who provides home health care for your elderly parents, the maid who cleans up your hotel room.

The Current Opportunity

Presently, the federal government is offering to pay 100% of the cost of expanding Medicaid to provide health coverage to these individuals. Beginning in 2020 the permanent federal share will be 90% of the costs. Many states have accepted the federal offer. They have also put their unique stamp on Medicaid. Innovative reforms are underway to encourage greater responsibility by recipients in their own health care.

But Missouri has so far failed to act. There has been no Medicaid reform or expansion. Catholic citizens can make sure 2014 is different.

Expanding Medicaid will Help the Working Poor

If Missouri expands its Medicaid program to 138% of the federal poverty level many more of the working poor will be able to get health coverage. A mother with one child would qualify for Medicaid with an income up to \$21,707 a year. Although some lower income workers may have health insurance through their employer, others do not and could obtain health coverage through an expansion of Medicaid. For example, single parents with the annual earnings showed below would qualify if Medicaid were expanded.

Occupation	Annual Salary
Home Health Worker	\$19,720
Maids	\$19,540
Cashiers	\$19,460

Missouri Department of Economic Development, Missouri Economic Research and Information Center
Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, 2012



Catholic Perspectives on Medicaid

Every person has a right to basic quality, affordable health care. This right flows from the sanctity and dignity of the human person who is made in the image and likeness of God. Every person also has a duty to the best of their ability to care for their health and the health of their family. A just healthcare system includes both rights and responsibilities and affirms human life at every stage of development.

Protect the Sanctity of Human Life

Missouri has been a national leader in enacting laws that protect human life at all stages of development. The state has enacted programs to offer pregnant women alternatives to abortion and ensured Medicaid is available to many pregnant women. As the Medicaid program is revised, these commitments should be reaffirmed and there should be an explicit prohibition on using Medicaid dollars to fund abortions.

Uphold the Dignity of Human Life

As much by his example as his words, Pope Francis is calling all of us to hear the cry of the poor and respond to their pleas. This cry needs to be heard by all of us, including our legislators in Jefferson City. Too many working adults and parents are uninsured because they do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot afford private insurance.

Practice Good Stewardship

As a matter of good stewardship, public officials have an obligation to ensure that the tax funds used to support Medicaid are spent wisely. Missouri has the authority to structure its Medicaid program to ensure that any expansion of Medicaid does not undermine the integrity of the state budget or diminish funding for other state services.

Call for Personal Responsibility

Medicaid reform should encourage recipients to take ownership of their own health care. For example, the legislation could require reasonable co-pays for medical services, encourage healthier personal habits and provide incentives for people to avoid unnecessary visits to emergency rooms. In this way the Medicaid program can respect the dignity of each person and recognize the value of personal responsibility and initiative.

What Catholics Can Do

Contact your State Representative and State Senator today. You can find your legislators' contact information by visiting www.mocatholic.org.

Urge reform and expansion of Medicaid so that more of Missouri's poorest citizens can access affordable health coverage.