

# Health Care for Immigrants

[We] see an immigration system which is morally unacceptable because it accepts the labor and taxes of millions of workers without offering them the protection of the law. At the same time, we scapegoat these newcomers for our social ills and use them as rhetorical targets for political purposes. It is therefore incumbent upon our elected officials, including Catholics, to carefully scrutinize these laws so as to serve basic human dignity and protect human life. Laws and policies which infringe upon dignity and harm human life are wrong and, as a moral matter, should be rebuffed or repealed. (*Cardinal Mahony, Bishops Call For Comprehensive Immigration Reform*)

## Church teaching

- ★ Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, 298*)
- ★ Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. With an estimated 47 million Americans lacking health care coverage, it is also an urgent national priority. Reform of the nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. (*Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship, A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*)

## Resources

- ★ **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** (USCCB) ([www.PovertyUSA.org](http://www.PovertyUSA.org))
- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) ([www.JusticeForImmigrants.org](http://www.JusticeForImmigrants.org))
- ★ **Catholic Health Association of Texas** ([www.CHATexas.org](http://www.CHATexas.org))
- ★ **Texas Department of State Health Services** ([www.dshs.state.tx.us](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us))
- ★ **Texas Health and Human Services Commission** ([www.hhsc.state.tx.us](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us))
- ★ **Catholic Charities USA** ([www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org](http://www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org))
- ★ **Catholic Health Association** (US) ([www.CHAusa.org](http://www.CHAusa.org))
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) ([www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml))

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The Texas Catholic Conference opposes attempts to reduce immigrant access to healthcare, a basic human right. We, along with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, advocate the following criteria for Health Care Reform and Immigration Reform.

## U.S. Bishops' Criteria for Health Care Reform Include:<sup>i</sup>

- **Respect for life.** Whether it preserves and enhances the sanctity and dignity of human life from conception to natural death.
- **Priority Concern for the Poor.** Whether it gives special priority to meeting the most pressing health care needs of the poor and underserved, ensuring that they receive quality health services.
- **Universal Access.** Whether it provides ready universal access to comprehensive health care for every person living in the United States.
- **Comprehensive Benefits.** Whether it provides comprehensive benefits sufficient to maintain and promote good health; to provide preventive care; to treat disease, injury and disability appropriately; and to care for persons who are chronically ill or dying.
- **Quality.** Whether it promotes the development of processes and standards that will help to achieve quality and equity in health services, in the training of providers, and in the informed participation of consumers in decision making on health care.
- **Equitable Financing.** Whether it assures society's obligation to finance universal access to comprehensive health care in an equitable fashion, based on ability to pay; and whether proposed cost-sharing arrangements are designed to avoid creating barriers to effective care for the poor and vulnerable.

## U.S. Bishops' Key Elements for Comprehensive Immigration Reform:<sup>ii</sup>

- **Earned Legalization:** An earned legalization program with a path to citizenship would require unauthorized workers to work for several years, take English courses, and pay a fine in order to participate in the program. Such a program would help stabilize the workforce, promote family unity, and bring a large population "out of the shadows," as members of their communities.
- **Enforcement:** The Bishops support the legitimate and important role of the United States government in enforcing immigration law at the border and in the interior. The Bishops also believe that by replacing illegal migration with legal migration, law enforcement will be better able to focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: drug and human traffickers, smugglers, and would-be terrorists. Any enforcement measures must be targeted, proportional, and humane.
- **Future Worker Program:** A worker program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the country safely and legally would help reduce illegal immigration and the loss of life in the American desert. Any program should include workplace protections, living wage levels, safeguards against the displacement of U.S. workers, and family unity.
- **Family-based immigration reform:** It currently takes years for family members to be reunited through the family-based legal immigration system. This leads to family breakdown and, in some cases, illegal immigration. Changes in the family-based immigration should be made to increase the number of family visas available and reduce family reunification waiting times.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Congress should examine the root causes of migration, such as wage inequities and the lack of job opportunities in sending countries, and seek long-term solutions. The antidote to the problem of illegal immigration is sustainable economic development in sending countries. Ideally, migration should be driven by choice, not necessity.
- **Restoration of Due Process Rights:** Due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) should be restored, particularly the use of judicial discretion in deportation proceedings.

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<sup>i</sup> "A Framework for Comprehensive Healthcare Reform." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<<http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/national/COMPCARE.PDF>>

<sup>ii</sup> Comprehensive Immigration Reform." Office of Migration & Refugee Policy. Migration & Refugee Services.

<<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/legal.shtml>>.