Washington State Catholic Conference

HEALTH CARE
Briefing Paper
Catholic Advocacy Day, 2010

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.
Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB 2007

BASIC HEALTH PLAN (BHP): The Washington State Basic Health Plan, started in 1987, is a state-subsidized health insurance program providing sliding scale coverage for individuals and families with a gross family income up to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and who are not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid. The BHP offers benefits, through managed care providers. The uninsured come primarily from working families with low and moderate incomes whose employers do not provide health care coverage. At its peak in 2001, BHP had capacity for 133,000 people. BHP currently covers fewer than 60,000 people.

In December, the Governor's proposed budget eliminated funding for the BHP. Her second budget proposal reinstated funding at a reduced level. In order to fund the BHP, the Governor's January budget relies on receiving more federal funds and increased general fund revenue.

ACTION: Please ask your Senator and Representatives to fund the Basic Health Plan in order to ensure that individuals and families have access to health insurance.

MENTAL HEALTH: There is growing awareness that barriers to mental health services exist in Washington State, particularly for veterans, children, the homeless, and for those involved in the criminal justice system. It is important to allow the mental health system the flexibility to ensure access to those in need of services. In the 2009-2011 biennial budget, millions of dollars were cut from mental health services for non-Medicaid clients. It is vitally important to fund these services.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT: Many people living on the streets, and many more living in our families, suffer from drug or alcohol addiction. If untreated, not only are the lives of those who are addicted disrupted, but many families suffer serious consequences. Chemical dependency treatment services are a vital part of our community safety net. This treatment reduces cost in human services, health care, and criminal justice. Through treatment people can find work, regain parental custody, avoid jail, and reduce ER visits.

The chemical dependency treatment program was reduced by $12.4 million in the 2009-2011 biennial budget. In addition, it suffered a $13.6 million reduction last year, due to a DSHS "accounting error". In her second proposed budget, the Governor restored a little over $5.5 million.

ACTION: Please ask your Senator and Representatives to restore $4.1 million for non-Medicaid mental health services, and $7 million for drug and alcohol treatment programs.

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