



## **CHRISTUS HEALTH AS A SAFETY NET: LOUISIANA**

### **The Issue**

As institutions providing faith-based health care, and often the only such facilities in their respective areas, CHRISTUS Health facilities are health care safety nets essential to those members of our communities who are uninsured, under-insured, or have inadequate access to health care. Maintaining and expanding federal funding of this safety net, through Medicare and Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments, the Community Access Program, and other initiatives, is imperative.

While the safety net provided by CHRISTUS Health facilities strains under the weight of the extraordinary burden that has been placed upon it, discussions about the health care safety net too often consider only public hospitals and health clinics, seemingly overlooking the fact that the majority of uncompensated care is provided by private facilities such as those in the CHRISTUS Health system.

But our contribution is great. We are often the major providers of trauma, burn, and neonatal intensive care services, as well as services for AIDS patients and the terminally ill. For Catholic hospital systems such as CHRISTUS, the provision of such services is indeed part of our mission. Yet, it is often the case that these services are not reflected in the amount of charity or uncompensated care provided.

In Louisiana, more than one in five adults between the ages of 19 and 65 has no health insurance. This amounts to approximately 813,000 Louisianans or 21 percent of the state's population. This population is a segment that can be difficult to reach – they are too old for Medicaid LaCHIP services, too young for Medicare, and cannot afford private insurance. There is an ever-growing need that continues to strain our facilities' ability to care for the poor and underserved.

### **The CHRISTUS Health Position: Advocate for a stronger safety net.**

CHRISTUS Health advocates for the strengthening of important safety net programs and highlights our ministry's role in providing services for low-income and under-served families for more than 130 years.

On the state level, CHRISTUS Health has been involved with the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative to develop and oversee the implementation of a blueprint for a quality-driven health care initiative in Louisiana. Additionally, CHRISTUS Health supports further legislative efforts to address the fiscal needs of safety net facilities, in a "dollar must follow the patient" model.

The Medicaid program in Louisiana provides essential health benefits to hundreds of thousands of our low-income children and adults who would otherwise not be able to afford health coverage. CHRISTUS Health advocates a strong overall expansion of the program to include more low-income applicants.

**Preserve full funding.** CHRISTUS Health will work with health care organizations and members of the Louisiana Legislature preserve full funding in FY2009 and beyond.

In addition, CHRISTUS Health will seek to strengthen the federal role in Medicaid, particularly regarding payments to hospitals, home care agencies and long-term care facilities.