



## CHRISTUS HEALTH AS A SAFETY NET

### The Issue

CHRISTUS Health facilities, along with others, provide a health care safety net essential to those members of our communities who are uninsured, underinsured, 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.

There are more than 44 million Americans without health care coverage. Even with some relief through the Medicare, Medicaid, and State Children's Health Insurance Program Benefits Improvement and Protection Act, or BIPA, growing need continues to strain our facilities' ability to care for the poor and underserved.

### **The CHRISTUS Health Position: Advocate for a stronger safety net and preserve full funding.**

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.

With the support of CHRISTUS Health, Congress recently created a "Citizen's Healthcare Working Group" to initiate a national debate on improving the healthcare system and assuring all Americans access to quality, affordable health care coverage.

CHRISTUS Health is working in collaboration with the Catholic Health Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Hospital Association to further this national dialogue on the tragedy of the uninsured.

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

CHRISTUS Health will work with health care organizations and members of Congress to oppose efforts to cut funds in FY 2006 and beyond.

CHRISTUS Health will work to support states who are in fiscal crisis protect the poor, elderly and disabled from state budget cuts and eligibility restrictions.

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

*January 2007*