



CHRISTUS HEALTH AS A SAFETY NET-TEXAS

The Issue

CHRISTUS Health facilities, along with other providers, provide a health care safety net 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.

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 45.7 million Americans without health care coverage. Even with some relief through the Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), growing need continues to strain our facilities' ability to care for the poor and underserved.

On the state level, safety net hospitals rely on Medicaid reimbursements and CHIP payments.

In 2007, the Texas Legislature expanded the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and redesigned Medicaid to provide health insurance to 200,000 of Texas' 5.6 million uninsured.

CHIP expansion undid some of the CHIP rollbacks from 2003 and included an extension of the CHIP enrollment period from 6 to 12 months; lower CHIP eligibility requirements; a modified 90-day CHIP waiting period that begins on the last date which the child was covered under a health benefits plan, rather than the date of the child's enrollment in the CHIP program; and a CHIP community outreach and education campaign and a toll-free CHIP hotline.

Key provisions of Medicaid reform were:

- Establishment of the Texas Health Opportunity Pool Trust Fund, a statewide trust fund designed to address issues related to the uninsured and uncompensated care.

- Joint development of a premium payment assistance program by the Health and Human Services Commission and the Texas Department of Insurance.
- Creation of a committee on health and long-term care insurance incentives, which will make recommendations on how to reduce the cost of health care coverage and expand coverage.
- Development of local and regional health care programs to provide health care services or benefits to small business employees. Participating employers and employees must pay a share of the premiums and other costs of the program.

Texas' Medicaid program accounts for 26 percent of the state's biennial budget. By instituting a more flexible, innovative methodology to provide health care to underprivileged Texans – focusing on prevention and better planning – the state will be able to serve Texans better and more cost effectively, and help them to live longer, healthier lives.

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

Medicaid provides essential health benefits to millions of low-income children and adults who would otherwise not be able to afford health coverage.

CHRISTUS Health supports increased state and local funding of Medicaid, CHIP and other health care programs for the indigent and uninsured.

We support restoration of Medicaid funding to pre-2003 levels and with minimal impact to funding care for the uninsured. We also support expanding eligibility for Medicaid and CHIP to levels allowed by federal law.

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