

FAITHFUL BUDGET FOR A HEALTHY NATION

Introduction:

A Faithful Budget ensures a health system that provides quality, affordable, accessible, equitable, accountable healthcare for all. All of our faiths deeply value the care of the sick and infirm. We are all challenged to care for those most in need. In our large and complex nation we know that it is the role of government to ensure that these needs are met. Many in the faith community partner with the government to provide needed services. It is this unique blend of public/private partnership that is the hallmark of the health system in the United States. At this moment the system is suffering from the unpredictability of federal commitment to ensuring that health services are adequately provided in our nation. To be faithful, this political gamesmanship must stop.

People Who Struggle:

As people of faith, we are most aware of those who struggle to achieve access to quality care. A faithful approach to the provision of health services requires that costs be shared equitably among all. It is fundamentally unjust to expect that the costs will be borne only by private charity or by individuals who have no capacity to pay. Therefore, it becomes the role of government to ensure that all of our residents have access to this basic right to healthcare. Of particular concern to people of faith are those who are most often marginalized in the delivery of care. Specifically we are concerned about:

- People in the rural parts of our nation who have experienced the closure of community hospitals and clinics and now find themselves without access to care.
- Women who often have specific needs that go untreated or unacknowledged.
- People of color have notoriously different medical outcomes even if they can access healthcare in our nation. A faithful budget will work to reduce these disparities.
- LGBTQ people also suffer discrimination in medical care.
- Native Americans and Alaska Natives, especially those in remote locations, who rely on the underfunded and inadequate Indian Health Service.

Affordable Care Act:

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was a significant improvement in the accessibility to health services allowing 21 million more people access to healthcare. While it has taken a few years for the full implementation of the legislation to stabilize markets, the political uncertainty is frightening our people and undercutting its effectiveness. A faithful budget focuses on the real needs of our communities rather than serving as a vehicle to score political points.

A Faithful Budget preserves and extends the gains of the ACA by fully funding it and holding to the following principles:

- Ensuring that healthcare is actually affordable through a combination of cost containment and premium and out-of-pocket subsidies for low income families.

- Enhanced accountability mechanisms to ensure that any premium rate increases are actually warranted and that there are no life time or annual caps on expenditures.
- Ensure that those with pre-existing conditions are guaranteed affordable, quality healthcare coverage and access to medical care.
- Prevention services available to all in order to ensure a healthy population.
- Protect the essential benefits and provide funding to cover the costs.
- Community Clinics that focus on serving underserved populations must be fully funded.

Medicare:

Senior citizens depend on Medicare for their access to healthcare in our nation. These seniors have paid into this insurance program during their working years and are now collecting on that investment. A faithful budget will protect this cost effective program that helps our seniors stay healthy and able to pay their part of needed services. It is a promise made to them during their working years and this is a promise that must be kept.

Therefore a Faithful Budget will:

- Ensure that Medicare continues to provide quality affordable healthcare to seniors for coming generations. .
- Allow for negotiated rates for pharmaceuticals.

Medicaid:

The expansion of Medicaid to serve all people living in poverty was a critical feature of the ACA. The fact that 19 states have still refused to care for their people is shocking and counter to the teachings of our faiths. We call on Congress to expand Medicaid to all eligible residents of our nation and to maintain its funding mechanisms and structure. This is of critical importance to the following populations:

- Patients needing long term care. These patients rely on in home care and nursing homes for their daily functioning. It is a pro-life stance to fund these needs in our nation. In fact, Medicaid pays for more than 60% of all nursing home residents. It is an essential life line for these patients and must be ensured.
- Low income and disabled children and adults. Medicaid and the Children's Health Initiative Program (CHIP) together provide comprehensive coverage to children and adults with low incomes and people with disabilities.
- Senior citizens with low income supplement their Medicare health access with Medicaid. Together these two cover essential health benefits for our elder and disabled population.

Targeted Programs:

Our Health System currently contains numerous programs targeted to specific groups of people because of their specific needs. The Veterans Health System and Indian Health Service are notable examples of

this. A Faithful Budget will fully fund these programs, recognizing that failure to do so will shift their recipients into other programs which also require funding.

- Veterans health care has a strong needs-based component, giving priority to our veterans whose income does not afford them other health options.
- Veterans health care recognizes the unique nature of many health issues faced by servicemen and women who have been sent into combat on behalf of their country.
- The Indian Health Service maintains clinics and other services for many members of our Native American population. A Faithful Budget addresses their needs both in cities and rural areas.

Research:

A Faithful Budget will be forward looking, addressing not only the health care needs of today but the healthcare solutions of tomorrow. Adequately funded research leads to new approaches to promote and restore health, and will save lives; without adequate funding, these approaches and the impacted lives will be at risk. This includes research related to public health issues of the day, including:

- HIV/AIDS
- Ebola
- Malaria
- Vaccinations