

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Healing is a significant sign and metaphor of biblical faith. The prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus himself were healers. Physical well-being was valued for its own sake as well as a sign of hope for the day when everyone would share equally in the blessings of shalom.

Many of Jesus' miracles were miracles of healing. He touched and healed lepers, restored sight, caused the lame to walk and renewed the life of the woman who had suffered for years with a flow of blood. Christ's example (Mark 6:53-56) has inspired countless Christian health care workers including those serving as missionaries. Clearly, we have understood Jesus' concern for physical well-being as a commission to carry on that work of healing.

Today in the United States we have a health care system that is in crisis. Health care providers, health office workers, health support staff, insurers, and payers form a patchwork system without any coordination based on policy.

Health statistics tell an ugly story. At any given time about 35 million people in the U.S., one-seventh of the population, have no health care coverage. They are not covered by private insurance, employer-based insurance or government programs. Another 60 million people, including a large proportion of the elderly, do not have adequate coverage.

In the U.S. we pay more for health care than other industrialized nations and get less for our money. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates the total cost of health care in the U.S. in 1992 to exceed \$800 billion, 13% of the gross national product. These dollars and percentages are rising daily.

Many people do not have health insurance and therefore go without basic health care. They see physicians less often and die younger than those with insurance. Even people with apparently good health insurance coverage have hidden vulnerabilities when faced with paying for expensive medical conditions. Catastrophic accidents or chronic long-term needs can bankrupt a family.

Efforts at shifting costs among government agencies, private insurers, and individual payers drain enormous amounts of energy and attention, and create enormous additional bureaucratic and regulatory costs beyond the costs for the health care itself.

Powerful forces seek to preserve the status quo, but we as American Baptists, like many other citizens and public officials, believe that the time has come for significant change.

Three general approaches dominate the national debate on universal access to health care. One would merely seek to reform current health insurance programs. The second is an aggregate of proposals under the umbrella term, "managed competition." The third, the "single-payer" approach, is a publicly financed system based on taxes with benefits paid by the government and with services delivered by the government and with services provided

by a mix of private and public providers, as Canada does. All have negatives as well as benefits.

In accordance with our 1975 Policy Statement on Health Care, we believe that health care should be viewed as a right, not a privilege, and that the basic goal for health care reform should be universal access to comprehensive benefits.

Therefore, as American Baptists, we urge the President and Congress to work together expeditiously to enact a major program of health care reform, which will extend health care coverage to every person in the United States.

We seek a national health care system that:

- Serves everyone in the United States
- Provides comprehensive access, care, and services
- Is sensitive to the needs and rights of health workers, patients, and their cultures
- Promotes health awareness, disease prevention, nutrition, fitness, and safety
- Slows the upward spiral of costs
- Draws financial support from the broad base of the entire nation
- Reduces unnecessary administrative costs
- Reduces inappropriate medical procedures

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167 For, 0 Against, 4 Abstentions

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Policy Base

Policy Statement on Health, Healing and Wholeness

- advocate for the availability of, access to, and funding for quality health care for all persons; and
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- advocate for legislative health care measures.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Health Care

As American Baptists we affirm and support programs, legislation, research and other formulations, which help develop a new comprehensive health care delivery system which provides quality services for all people.

- Make health care resources, private and public, available in keeping with the total needs of people, rather than on the basis of economic, geographic or racial factors;
- Provide equitable health care for all residents of the U.S.A. by eliminating financial barriers