

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Corporate Social Responsibility Issue Paper

Caring for Health: Domestic Access to Health Care

Background

“God creates human beings as whole persons—each one a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit. Health concerns the proper functioning and well-being of the whole person” (“Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor” [ELCA 2003], page 3¹). “We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) in America have an enduring commitment to work for and support health care for all people as a shared endeavor” (page 2). The crisis in health care today includes rising costs of health care, growing numbers of people with inadequate health care resources, and the system in distress. The church is called to be an active participant in fashioning a just and effective health care system (page 1).

Health care expenditures make up 16% of the United States gross domestic product, or nearly \$2.6 trillion in 2010.² Advances in pharmaceutical treatments and medical devices continue to bring renewed hope for the prevention, cure and management of many diseases. Spending continues to increase due to new technology and prescription drugs, a rise in chronic disease and increased administrative costs.³

In an attempt to address growing health care costs and the needs of 50 million Americans without health insurance, the U.S. Congress in 2010 enacted the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Because the Act is still in the process of being implemented, it remains to be seen how many of these people will be covered by insurance.⁴

Other health issues warrant review, including smoking policies, elimination of toxic chemical compounds in health care, development of safer alternatives for toxic compounds, and overall health and safety policies. In addition, increasing attention in recent years has focused on developing healthy lifestyles, including addressing the widespread problem of obesity. Foundations have been placing this as a priority especially as it relates to children.⁵ The ELCA’s Portico Benefit Services also has emphasized the challenge of living well.⁶

ELCA Social Policy

The ELCA social statement “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor” (August 2003) develops this church’s vision of health, illness, and healing. Part of that vision is for equitable access to health care. An individual’s responsibility for caring for his or her own health—such as eating well, avoiding tobacco use, and avoiding excessive alcohol consumption—is cited. In addition, the church’s ministry in health care is highlighted at both a congregational and social ministry

¹ <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HealthSS.pdf>

² <http://www.kaiseredu.org/en/Topics/Costs-and-Spending.aspx>

³ <http://www.kaiseredu.org/Issue-Modules/US-Health-Care-Costs/Background-Brief.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.kaiseredu.org/Topics/Insurance.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/program-areas/childhood-obesity/strategy.html>

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organization level. A major component of this social statement is the issue of access for all. Justice requires health care to be provided on the basis of need, giving particular attention to those who are disenfranchised from the system (page 19). At the same time, the statement says that a combination of individual, market, and governmental approaches is necessary to begin to provide equitable access (page 20).

The ELCA social statement “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” (August 2011)⁷ and accompanying genetics issue paper⁸ address specific issues relating to genetics and domestic health.

Corporate Response

As the problems above indicate, all privately and publicly held corporations face issues associated with wellness, provision of health care, and access to pharmaceuticals. Every corporation and family business faces decisions about health insurance for their employees, the health care available to their employees, and the costs to their employees for such care. All have to make decisions related to their ability to be part of the solution to the health crisis. The pharmaceutical companies in this country have an additional challenge to face in that they provide some of the basic materials needed for health and wellness and must address how these goods can be distributed equitably. Although many pharmaceutical companies have developed free access programs that work for some individuals, the overall effect is a patchwork of responses that do not include access for all.

Social Criteria Investment Screens

The alcohol and pornography social criteria investment screens approved by the ELCA in 1988 and updated in 2007 respond to this issue. The tobacco social criteria investment screen approved by the ELCA in 1988, updated in 2007 and 2012 also responds to this issue⁹.

Resolution Guidelines for ELCA

1. We support resolutions asking for both the development of ethical criteria for the extension of patents on prescription drugs and reports on the implications of such criteria.
2. We support a report on the company’s initiatives to create, expand, and implement policies and programs to extend pharmaceutical accessibility, taking into account the costs and benefits.
3. We support adoption of policies and principles stating all people should have access to basic, continuous and affordable physical and mental health care, including substance abuse treatment and dental care, and/ we support reduction of the number of uninsured people and reduction of healthcare costs.
4. We support creation of a policy of price restraints on branded pharmaceuticals, utilizing a combination of approaches to keep drug prices at reasonable levels, such as increases that would not exceed the previous year’s Consumer Price Index.

⁷ <http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/GeneticsSS.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Advocacy/Corporate-Social-Responsibility/CCA-5-IP-12-Genetics.aspx>

⁹ http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Tobacco_Screen.pdf

5. We support reports assessing the company's policy responses to regulatory, legislative and public pressures to improve access to and the affordability of its products.
6. We support policies addressing conflicts of interest involving board members with health industry affiliations.
7. We support reports disclosing the extent and types of payments, incentives, or rebates that are made to doctors, pharmacy benefit managers, and other pharmaceutical purchasers in order to influence the selection of a particular drug.
8. We support reports and policies on the occurrence of and phasing out of the manufacture of PVC- or phthalate-containing medical supplies where safe alternatives are available.
9. We support reports on the use and effects of antibiotics in animal feeds
10. We support reports evaluating the feasibility of removing dibutyl phthalates, parabens, mercury and brominated flame retardants from devices and products.
11. We support reports and adoption of goals to reduce the occupational and community health hazards from manufacturing or recycling lead batteries, both within the company and in the supply chain.
12. We support reports on using safer substitutes as they become available for chemicals that are known or suspected to cause cancer or mutations, harm the reproductive system, affect the endocrine system, accumulate in the body or persist in the environment.
13. We support reports on policies regarding the use of nanomaterials in a product.
14. We support resolutions asking for warnings on products and for marketing programs that discourage youth from using tobacco products.
15. We support companies having the same policies in developing nations restricting marketing of tobacco products as in the United States.
16. We support policies to reduce nicotine content in tobacco products.
17. We support proposals asking for smoke-free facilities and expanded smoke-free boundaries around building entrances.
18. We support reports to the board about the health risks of products involved with tobacco sales.
19. We support reports on the health impacts on teens that result from exposure to the portrayal of smoking in movies, DVD's, TV productions, video games and other media.
20. We support reports on policies to address the negative effects of gambling and programs to assist individuals addicted to gambling.
21. We support reports asking whether a product, service or political action is contributing to the epidemic of violence.
22. We support policy responses to concerns regarding linkages of fast food to childhood obesity, diet-related diseases and other effects on the health of children.

Resolution guidelines for ELCA – General

23. We support practices of good governance, specifically:
 - A company having an independent chair or independent lead director;
 - Reports on policies, transparency of procedures for political contributions and expenditures (both direct and indirect made with corporate funds);
 - Reports on any portion of any dues or similar payments made to any tax exempt organization or trade organization that is used for an expenditure or contribution which might be deemed political; and
 - Guidelines or policies governing the company's political contributions and expenditures.

Recommended by the Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, May 20, 2004
Endorsed by the Division Church Society Board, October 22, 2004
Approved by Church Council, November 11, 2004
Updated by the Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility, April 8, 2008
Approved by Church Council, November 2008 [CC08.11.57a]
Approved by Church Council, November 2013 [CC13.11.69y]