

Mount Zion Temple - Jewish Community Action Children's Initiative Health Care Reform and Jewish Values

Jewish values require us to take a stand on reforming health care in our country.

Moses Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher, sage and physician, listed health care as the most important communal service that a city had to offer to its residents. (*Mishnah Torah, Sefer Hamadda IV:23*) In the *Shulchan Aruch*, a codification of Jewish law, doctors are required to reduce their rates for poor patients, and, where that is not sufficient, communal subsidies are to be used.

(*Yoreh Deah 249:16*; and in the *Responso Ramat Rahel* of Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg sections 24-25)

Therefore being members of a Jewish community, we are obligated to ensure that accessible, affordable medical care is available to all in our larger community. This call to action to make a change in our health care system is embodied in the concept *mipneh tikkun ha-olam*—what we are obligated to do in order to repair the world.

As Jews, we must work to make health care more affordable and accessible for all of Americas if we are to be faithful to the prophetic mandate to “do justly” and provide for those in need.

Jewish Values that Obligate Us to Take Action on Health Care Reform

PIKUACH NEFESH – The Saving of Human Life- **All people in the United States need access to health care to prevent loss of life.** So great is the commandment of saving life and health that it is of greater concern than ritual matters. Nearly all religious observances are subordinated to it. We may even violate the Sabbath to save a person's life.

SHEMIRAT HAGUF – Guarding/Taking Care of One's Body- **Health care reform must stress individual responsibility for health as well as the provision of comprehensive and prevention oriented health care including mental health and dental care services at every stage of an individual's life.** In addition to requiring a response to illnesses when they occur, Jewish law also requires that we make all attempts to stay well. Maimonides understands this obligation to include positive aspects, such as exercise and seeking out proper medical care, as well as negative ones, such as refraining from damaging one's body through the consumption of harmful food or drugs.

TZEDAKAH – Communal Obligation to Meet Basic Human Needs- **Health care services must be affordable (premiums and out-of-pocket costs) and we must pool our resources to care for all.** Just as the Jewish community recognizes an obligation to provide for such basic needs as food, clothing and shelter through the collection and distribution of communal funds, so too have Jews long insisted that no person be denied access to basic health care on account of inability to pay. While physicians are not required to provide their services for free, communal subsidies can be called upon as well as providing reduced rates for poor patients.

We believe Rabbi Hillel's famous quote: "*What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it*" sums up all of the Jewish values we have expressed above. In regards to the current health care reform debate it could be restated as:

"Do not tolerate health care coverage for your neighbor which would be unacceptable to you. This is the whole of health care reform; the rest is in the details. Now go and work for it."

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN!