Health inequities across our communities

Minority groups have always played a vital role in our county’s history, strength and growth. But, unfortunately, poorer health for minorities is also part of the story.

African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders don’t do as well when their health indicators are compared to their white counterparts. These populations experience higher rates of illness and death in many areas: heart disease, stroke, specific cancers, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, asthma, hepatitis B, overweight and obesity.

There is nothing wrong with the bodies or behaviors of people of color that creates these differences in health outcomes. Certainly we all have to be good stewards of our own bodies, but the environment that we live in plays an even greater role in shaping the health of whole communities. Those that face discrimination, poor housing, unemployment, and weak education systems will not be as healthy. This is called the “social determinants of health.”

The way we live together actually impacts our bodies. For people of faith, this is an invitation to advocate for policies and practices that support strong communities – standing against racism, supporting efforts to keep jobs in our communities, working for affordable housing or stronger local schools. When people have strong, economically stable and safe communities, their health outcomes are better. Amazing, isn’t it?!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us the compassion and will to work for justice and wholeness in our world. Give us strength, courage and hope to make change. Amen.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • cdc.gov/minorityhealth • cancer.gov/cancertopics/prevention • cdc.gov/minorityhealth/CHDReport.html • nimh.nih.gov • chicagofaithandhealth.org

The Affordable Care Act After March 31, 2014

The deadline for open enrollment for health care insurance coverage for 2014 is March 31. If you miss the deadline, you will have to wait until October 2014 to sign up for coverage that will start in 2015. The only exception is if you have a major life event such as:

✦ getting married
✦ becoming divorced
✦ losing your job
✦ turning 27 years old and becoming ineligible to remain on a parent’s policy

Anyone who does not have health care coverage by April 1 may have to pay a penalty of $95 per person or 1% of annual household income, whichever is greater. This penalty will be imposed on your tax return.

In Illinois, people who are financially eligible can still sign up for coverage under Medicaid on an on-going basis.

Illinois has the ABE (Application for Benefits Eligibility) program where you can sign up in one place for all state assistance programs, such as Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP and Cash Assistance. Go to abe.illinois.gov/abe/access to see if you are eligible and to sign up.

People with Medicare do not need to do anything further, and their coverage will continue with some additional benefits:

✦ Medicare recipients can now get more preventive services like colonoscopies or mammograms without charges to Part B or deductibles.
✦ They can get discounts on brand-name drugs.
✦ They can expect support from their doctors to make sure that their medical care will be well coordinated across providers.

For more information, go to getcoveredillinois.gov, or call 866.311.1119 to talk with someone who can help you.