



## Opinion: The morality of Medicaid

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The moral voice of the religious community needs to be heard on one of the most critical issues today. As faith leaders in Greater Cincinnati, we have come together to address this issue, whether Ohio should pursue the Medicaid expansion made possible under federal health care reform.

Our various spiritual traditions have certain commonalities, one of the most important of which is that we must respond to those in need. Need takes a variety of forms – hunger, homelessness, illness or injury, nakedness. The imperative facing our local communities throughout Ohio is that when we perceive such need, we respond to it. Indifference is not an option.

This imperative to respond becomes complicated when we encounter not just an individual but an entire segment of society in need. Such a situation presents itself with respect to health care coverage.

Studies reveal that Ohio has about 1.5 million uninsured people. The federal Affordable Care Act provides coverage options to most of those persons. Almost 300,000 would be covered by the Medicaid expansion, made optional for states by the U.S. Supreme Court last summer.

Gov. Kasich has proposed that the expansion be adopted, as good for Ohio and Ohioans. Almost every organization in the state has endorsed it, from the chamber of commerce to Ohio Right to Life, the hospital and medical associations, virtually all nonprofits, advocacy groups and faith communities. The only known opponents include the Buckeye Institute, the Cato Institute and the tea party.

Opponents rely on arguments largely reflecting distrust of the federal government and dislike of Medicaid. They worry that Congress will renege on its promised funding – despite the fact that it has never done so since Medicaid began in the 1960s – and that Medicaid rewards those who are dependent and who do not exercise personal responsibility.

With respect for those who advance these arguments, we reject them as inconsistent with documented facts, and more importantly, as inconsistent with the imperative of our spiritual traditions that we must respond to those in need – regardless of the circumstances that brought them into need.

In no tradition is a test applied to determine whether those in need contributed to their need through inaction, bad decision or dysfunction, in a way that might disqualify them from help.

As leaders in our faith communities, we believe this opportunity to expand Medicaid is consistent with the imperative to respond in our various traditions, and we urge its adoption.

The state will benefit greatly from the economic and fiscal impacts. More importantly, the hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who will gain health coverage will lead dramatically improved lives, benefiting not only themselves but their families, their employers and their communities.

Our faith compels us to act on our moral voice, both in our individual lives and as citizens living in a complex society.

We urge all Ohioans to support Medicaid expansion as an act of faith and social justice.