

Foreword: David Beckmann

In 2015, we learned the child mortality rate around the world has been cut in half in just the past 25 years. Hunger and poverty rates are also falling rapidly in developing countries. Indeed this progress is unprecedented in human history.

Nearly half of all preventable child deaths are linked to hunger and malnutrition. The 2016 Hunger Report reminds us of how hunger, poverty, and poor health are so often interlocking conditions. Hunger and poverty put people at greater risk of poor health by limiting access to nutritious foods that promote good health.

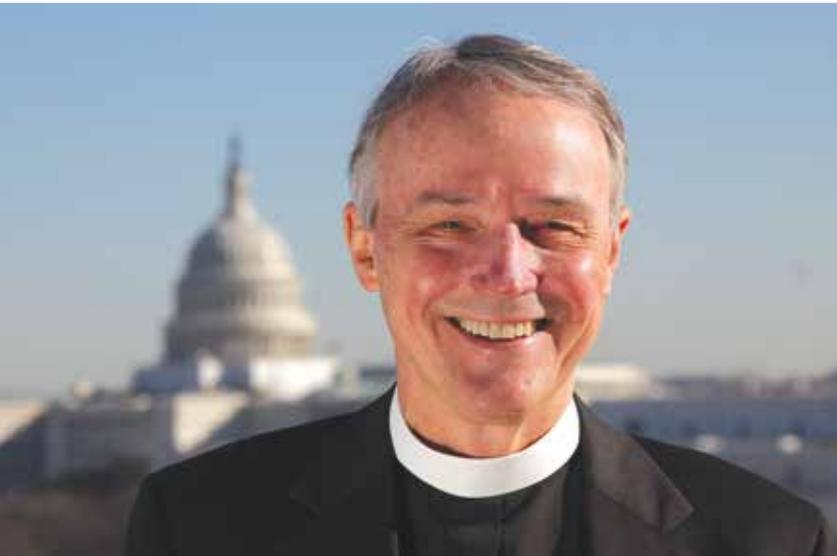
Hunger and poverty take a toll on health in all societies, including right here in the United States. New research discussed in this report shows the effects of stress living day to day and having to choose between paying for food and keeping a roof over one's head. The medical profession calls this toxic stress, and like exposure to any toxin, physical and mental health break down as a result. In children, relentless exposure to toxic stress literally rewires the brain and has permanent effects on physical and mental health.

Poor health is a leading cause of hunger and poverty, especially when people are already trapped in tenuous economic circumstances.

A job that does not offer sick leave. A lack of health insurance. One accident, one illness, and suddenly the floor collapses. When an accident or illness strikes a breadwinner, there is collateral damage: children and other dependents.

Despite marriage vows of commitment in sickness and health, we know that poor health can tear families apart. In the United States, the social safety net prevents families from sinking into the most degrading poverty, but it is much more geared to short-term hardships, not the kind that result from chronic illnesses or disabilities that are permanent conditions.

The 2016 Hunger Report is focused mostly on hunger, poverty, and health in the United States, where unlike the progress we've seen in the developing world, hunger and poverty rates soared in the Great Recession and are stuck at an alarming plateau. In recent years, Congress has sought to cut food assistance and other poverty-focused programs. Bread for the World and other church groups have helped to block these cuts, thus avoiding higher rates of hunger and poverty, and as a result higher health costs.



U.S. healthcare spending is projected to reach 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the next decade. Healthcare costs are the nation's most pressing fiscal challenge. No other high-income country spends as much of its GDP on health care as we do here in the United States. We are not spending more because we are healthier. On the most telling indicators of population health, the United States fares worse than all of our peer countries. On life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, food insecurity, and obesity, we rank at the bottom, or near the bottom, among our peers.

One reason we are spending more than these other countries is because, as a nation, we tolerate higher rates of poverty and hunger. In 2014, according to research conducted for this report, food insecurity and hunger in the United States added \$160 billion to national health expenditures. Fiscal prudence calls for the expansion of efforts to reduce hunger and poverty—not cutbacks in programs essential to reducing the harmful effects of hunger and poverty on health.

Reducing healthcare costs is an issue that unites people of all political views. If we reduce poverty and hunger, we will save healthcare costs and as a result reduce our debt. If the United States could reduce healthcare costs to the level that other countries at our level of income pay, we would have the money to invest in the kinds of things that lead to more prosperity, such as infrastructure, education and training the workforce to be competitive in the global economy.

Like millions of other people, I was moved by Pope Francis' visit to our country in September 2015. In word and gesture, he shared God's love for all people, and he urged us to respond by reflecting God's love for all people in our personal behavior and in our nation's laws and systems.

When he spoke to Congress and the nation as a whole, he celebrated the progress that the world is making against poverty and urged continued progress. In Pope Francis' own words, "The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts, especially in its causes."



Rev. David Beckmann

President,

Bread for the World and Bread for the World Institute

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