

Article Text

Article menu



Ethics, economics, and public financing of health care

Jeremiah Hurley



Abstract

There is a wide variety of ethical arguments for public financing of health care that share a common structure built on a series of four logically related propositions regarding: (1) the ultimate purpose of a human life or human society; (2) the role of health and its distribution in society in advancing this ultimate purpose; (3) the role of access to or utilisation of health care in maintaining or improving the desired level and distribution of health among members of society, and (4) the role of public financing in ensuring the ethically justified access to and utilisation of health care by members of society. This paper argues that economics has much to contribute to the development of the ethical foundations for publicly financed health care. It focuses in particular on recent economic work to clarify the concepts of access and need and their role in analyses of the just distribution of health care resources, and on the importance of economic analysis of health care and health care insurance markets in demonstrating why public financing is necessary to achieve broad access to and utilisation of health care services.

<https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.27.4.234>

Statistics from Altmetric.com



Referenced in **3** policy sources
Referenced in **4** Wikipedia pages
105 readers on Mendeley

See more details

Cookies and privacy

We and our **159** partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting I Accept enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject All or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content may not be displayed correctly. If you wish to reuse any or all of this article please use the link below which will take you to the Copyright Clearance Center's RightsLink service. You will be able to get a quick price and instant permission to reuse the content in many different ways. [Cookie policy](#)

I Accept

Reject All

[Manage preferences](#)

We and our partners process data to provide:
Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services.

Request permissions

Footnotes


Jeremiah Hurley, PhD, is Professor in the Department of Economics and Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Read the full text or download the PDF:

Buy this article (£53)

Subscribe

Log in



Specialist Clinical Fellow

Slough | £61,825 per annum

The Older Peoples Medicine, Frailty and Palliative directorate, like most other Units in the Trust, works as a single unit

Recruiter: Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply for this job](#)

Breast Clinician

Swindon | £59,175 to £95,400 Per annum

Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a provider of both acute hospital and community services. It serves the local population of Swindon...

Recruiter: Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply for this job](#)

I Accept

Reject All

Manage preferences

Clinical Research Fellow

Leeds | £49,909 a year

We and our 159 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting 'Accept' enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting 'Reject All' or withdrawing your consent will disable them. Trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Cookie settings link on the bottom of the webpage . Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [Cookie policy.](#)

Adult Clinical Research Fellow

Oxford, Oxfordshire | Grade E63: £36,616 - £70,425 per annum

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

Apply for this job



CONTENT

- Latest content
- Current issue
- Archive
- Browse by collection
- Most read articles
- Responses

JOURNAL

- About
- Editorial board
- Sign up for email alerts
- Subscribe
- Thank you to our reviewers

AUTHORS

- Instructions for authors
- Submit an article
- Editorial policies
- Open Access at BMJ

Cookies and privacy

We and our **159** partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting I Accept enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject All or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Cookie settings link on the bottom of the webpage . Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [Cookie policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

- Permissions
- Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device.
- Advertising
- Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

Feedback form

I Accept

Reject All

[Manage preferences](#)



Website Terms & Conditions

Privacy & Cookies

Contact BMJ

Cookie settings

Online ISSN: 1473-4257 Print ISSN: 0306-6800

Copyright © 2025 BMJ Publishing Group Ltd & Institute of Medical Ethics. All rights, including for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies, are reserved.

Cookies and privacy

We and our **159** partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting I Accept enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject All or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Cookie settings link on the bottom of the webpage . Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [Cookie policy](#).

We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

I Accept

Reject All

[Manage preferences](#)