HHS Answers Questions Regarding ACA Marketplace Enrollment and Implementation

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently released a new version of its Website to help educate the public and healthcare providers about options for enrolling in the insurance Marketplace (exchanges) through the Affordable Care Act. Individuals will be able to enroll October 1, 2013 through March 31, 2014. The Website offers information to answer questions including:

- What is the Health Insurance Marketplace?
- What is the Marketplace in my state?
- What if I have job-based insurance?
- How can I get coverage at lower costs?
- What do small businesses need to know?

In addition, those inquiring about eligibility can participate in an online questionnaire designed to help individuals identify an appropriate insurance plan. HHS encourages the public to use this website as guidance in navigating the enrollment process.

Below are supplemental education materials AACN members may find useful:

**Health Insurance Marketplace**

**Marketplace Updates**
For information on how to sign up for coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace, including text message and email updates, visit [http://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/index.html](http://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/index.html).

**Upcoming State-by-State Calls**
HHS offers regional quarterly calls to provide updates on the Marketplace and listen to feedback. The next round of quarterly calls will begin the week of **July 29, 2013** in each state with a Federally-facilitated or State Partnership Marketplace. Individuals and organizations that will interact with and utilize the Marketplace are encouraged to join these calls. To learn where and when these calls will be held in your region, visit [http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/OpenDoorForums/ODF_HealthInsuranceMarketplace.html](http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/OpenDoorForums/ODF_HealthInsuranceMarketplace.html).

**State by State Fact Sheets**
Choose your state to learn more about the immediate benefits of the Affordable Care Act, [http://www.healthcare.gov/law/information-for-you/index.html](http://www.healthcare.gov/law/information-for-you/index.html).
Coming in August: Resource to Support Your Advocacy Efforts during the Congressional Recess

As members of Congress begin to head home for the August Congressional recess, AACN members are highly encouraged to reach out and connect with legislators in their home districts. To assist you in your advocacy efforts, AACN’s Department of Government Affairs will offer an online resource with information regarding the current political and fiscal context impacting decisions at the federal level, scheduling a visit with your member of Congress, AACN talking points related to support for programs of interest, and other Congressional activity affecting nursing education, research, and practice.

As Congress continues to work toward a budget deal to fund federal programs and alleviate the effects of sequestration, it is imperative that conversations surrounding the importance of federal support for nursing education and healthcare research continue through the scheduled recess.

Be sure to review this information if you plan to visit with your members of Congress while they are back in your home district. This resource will be available on AACN’s Government Affairs webpage in early August. If you have any questions, please contact Director of Government Affairs and Health Policy Suzanne Miyamoto at Smiyamoto@aacn.nche.edu.

FY 2014 Appropriations Update: Senate Appropriations Committee Approves LHHS Spending Bill

On July 11, 2013, by a vote of 16-14, the Senate Committee on Appropriations approved their Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS-ED) bill for FY 2014. In her opening statement, Chairwoman Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) remarked, “Today we are marking up the Labor-HHSEDucation Bill, which supports America’s human infrastructure. In other words, America’s greatest asset- our people. This bill meets compelling human needs in areas such as healthcare, education and job training.” Regarding the spending level outlined in the bill, Committee Vice Chairman Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL) stated, “I have serious concerns regarding certain aspects of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill. First, it takes a big step down a spending path that I have previously described as a statutory dead end.”

The full Senate Appropriations Committee mark-up and approval of the spending package came just two days after AACN first reported that the Senate’s LHHS-ED Subcommittee had passed the measure by a voice vote and provided $251.099 million for the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act). This level is consistent with the President’s Budget Proposal as well as AACN’s and the Nursing Community’s requests for FY 2014. The approximately $33.5 million increase over the FY 2013 level (post-sequestration) is reflected in the Title VIII Advanced Education Nursing program.

Report language included in the bill emphasizes the need for a more highly educated nursing workforce and the importance of supporting students as future nurse faculty. “The Committee remains concerned that waiting lists for admission to nursing schools are limiting our Nation's ability to address the nursing shortage. For that reason, the Committee continues to place a strong priority on filling vacant nursing faculty positions, the majority of which require either a Ph.D. or a doctorate of nursing practice. The Committee encourages the Division of Nursing to prioritize this level of training and create incentives for students to pursue teaching as a career.” AACN commends the Committee’s recommendation and continues to work toward meeting the growing demand for nurse faculty by supporting programs such as Title VIII.

In addition, AACN also applauds the Committee’s proposal that “no less than $5,000,000 be awarded to nurse-managed health centers” (Nurse-Managed Health Clinics) through the Title VIII Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention program. The bill also provides $145.272 million for the National Institute of Nursing Research, an increase of $8.860 million (6.50%) over FY 2013.
While the Senate’s LHHS-ED allocation totals $165 billion (compared to the House’s allocation of $122 million), sequestration, or mandatory across-the-board-cuts to discretionary spending, continues to threaten vital healthcare programs. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress continues to work toward a deal that will protect programs from these harmful cuts. AACN’s FY 2014 Appropriations funding chart provides a side-by-side comparison of the Senate’s FY 2014 levels to the final FY 2013 funding levels (post sequestration). Further details on the Senate’s LHHS-ED bill can be found in the Committee’s press release.

It is not yet known when the House will consider their LHHS-ED funding levels for FY 2014. AACN will continue to keep our members apprised of the appropriations process and advocate to support the highest funding levels for our programs of interest. For more information on AACN’s appropriations advocacy efforts, click here.

**Reps. Walden, Schwartz Introduce Bill Allowing APRNs to Certify Home Health Services**

On June 26, 2013, Representative Greg Walden (R-OR) and Representative Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) introduced H.R. 2504, the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2013. The bill would allow nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives, and physician assistants to certify home health services for Medicare beneficiaries. These services include: intermittent skilled nursing care; physical therapy; speech-language pathology services; and continued occupational therapy. As America’s patient population continues to age, it is critical that beneficiaries are able to receive these services in a timely manner.

The legislation is a testament to the significant role Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) play in home health and supports these providers to the full extent of their education and training. AACN, in collaboration with the APRN community, continues to advocate for APRNs to practice to the full extent of their education and training. Recently, AACN sent letters to Representatives Walden and Schwartz expressing gratitude for their support of this bill.

For more information on H.R. 2504, including the full text of the legislation, visit: [http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr2504](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr2504).

**AACN Cosponsors Briefing on Public Health**

On June 20, 2013, AACN cosponsored a congressional briefing organized by the Coalition for Health Funding (CHF) titled “Public Health 101: Health is All Around You.” The briefing was well attended by CHF member organization representatives, Hill staff, and other public health stakeholders, and focused on the intersection of public health and military readiness, education, public safety, and business. Speakers from each of these industries commented on the ways good health and well-being are necessary to our nation’s defense, academic progress, and economic stability.

CHF President Judy Sherman moderated the session which took place in the Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, DC. Naomi Adler, Esq., President & CEO of the United Way of Westchester and Putnam, emphasized the importance of environment, culture, and education in creating healthy, stable communities. David Johnson, Senior Vice President of the Employee Benefits Division at RCM&D, talked about the excessive costs incurred by businesses when the workforce is unhealthy. He estimated businesses pay approximately $576 billion per year due to the poor health of their employees.
Jim Parsons, Director of the VERA Institute of Justice Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program, discussed the prevalence of mental illness in incarcerated individuals and how lack of treatment, both while in custody and once released, increase recidivism. The military perspective was provided by Dr. Ryung Suh, CEO of Atlas Research and faculty at Georgetown University, as well as the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Dr. Suh explained the necessity of a healthy military for maintaining battlefield readiness and the stressed importance of continuing adequate care to veterans.

For more information on the Coalition and its work, see: http://publichealthfunding.org.

**CMS to Delay Durable Medical Equipment Requirements for One Year**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have announced they will delay the implementation of Durable Medical Equipment (DME face-to-face) requirements. The recent announcement below from CMS describes this extension:

“Due to concerns that some providers and suppliers may need additional time to establish operational protocols necessary to comply with face-to-face encounter requirements mandated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for certain items of DME, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services will start actively enforcing and will expect full compliance with the DME face-to-face requirements beginning on October 1, 2013.

Section 6407 of the ACA established a face-to-face encounter requirement for certain items of DME. The law requires that a physician must document that a physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant or clinical nurse specialist has had a face-to-face encounter with the patient. The encounter must occur within the 6 months before the order is written for the DME.

Although many durable medical equipment suppliers and physicians are aware of and are able to comply with this policy, CMS is concerned that some may need additional time to establish operational protocols necessary to comply with this new law. As such, CMS expects that during the next several months, suppliers and physicians who order certain DME items will continue to collaborate and establish internal processes to ensure compliance with the face-to-face requirement. CMS expects durable medical equipment suppliers to have fully established such internal processes and have appropriate documentation of required encounters by October 1, 2013.

CMS will continue to address industry questions concerning the new requirements and will update information on our web site at www.cms.gov/medical-review. CMS and its contractors will also use other communication channels to ensure that the provider community is properly informed of this announcement.”

AACN submitted comments to CMS on this regulation last December and will continue to report updates on DME to the membership.

**PCORI Holds Webinar on Research Dissemination**

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research institute (PCORI) will hold a webinar on Monday, July 29 from 9:00am–5:00pm ET to consider the most effective methods of disseminating research findings to patients, caregivers, clinicians, and other healthcare stakeholders. The event will feature a roundtable discussion by experts on distribution and implementation of research findings. To view the agenda, or to register, see: http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/dissemination-and-implementation-roundtable-share-your-thoughts/.

PCORI also welcomes public comments on this topic. During the webinar, there will be opportunities to submit feedback during a public comment period, through the PCORI website, or through email. In addition, PCORI is soliciting input on several questions prior to the webinar, available here: http://www.pcori.org/funding-opportunities/dissemination-and-implementation-roundtable-share-your-thoughts/.
IOM Reviews Clinical and Translational Science Award Program

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program supports translational research through partnerships with institutions, the provision of tools and information to investigators, and training for the scientific workforce. CTSA institutions collectively comprise the CTSA Consortium, a national network of clinical and translational research sites. This type of research focuses on ways to make basic science practically applicable.

As the NIH looks to move into the next phase of the project, which will focus on transforming the current clinical research environment, it commissioned the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to evaluate the CTSA program. The final IOM report, issued June 25, applauds the endeavor and states it “is contributing significantly to advancing clinical and translational research.” The report also provides several suggestions to further enhance the program’s impact, including strengthening the program’s leadership, streamlining the CTSA Consortium, building on the strengths of individual CTSAs, standardizing evaluation processes, increasing the focus on innovative approaches to education, prioritizing community engagement, and increasing the emphasis on child health.

For more information on the CTSA program, see: https://www.ctsacentral.org/.

To review the IOM report, see: http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2013/The-CTSA-Program-at-NIH-Opportunities-for-Advancing-Clinical-and-Translational-Research.aspx.

July 1 Deadline Doubles Interest Rate on New Student Loans

On July 1, 2013, interest rates on federally subsidized undergraduate Stafford student loans doubled from 3.4% to 6.8% as Congress failed to pass legislation preventing this increase (this only affects new loans taken out). While several proposals had been offered in both the House and the Senate, none garnered the support necessary to be enacted and stave off this increase.

President Obama also offered a plan that would allow interest rates to vary with the Treasury note. His plan did not include caps on interest rates, however, a loan’s rate would become locked in at the point when a student took out the loan. The President has indicated he would accept caps on interest rates. Some Congressional leaders assert that a solution may still be passed that could potentially reverse the increase and delay the interest hike for another year. AACN will continue to report Congressional activity surrounding this issue.

Calling for Title VIII Recipient ‘Profiles of Success’

In honor of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Title VII Health Professions and Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs (Public Health Service Act), the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC) is creating a database of profiles of students who have benefited from Title VII and VIII. AACN, a member of HPNEC, is assisting in this endeavor by collecting profiles of students who have benefited from the Nursing Workforce Development programs. These programs include Advanced Nursing Education Grants, Advanced Education Nursing Traineeships, Nurse Anesthetist Traineeships, Workforce Diversity Grants, Nurse Education, Practice, Quality, and Retention Grants, the Nursing Student Loan Program, the Nurse Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs, Nurse Faculty Loan Program Grants, and Comprehensive Geriatric Education Grants.

The profiles will be used to educate Congress and the public on how Title VII and Title VIII have successfully evolved over the past five decades to meet the changing profile of the healthcare workforce and patient population. This fall will commemorate 50 years of Title VII programs, while fall 2014 will honor the 50th anniversary of Title VIII. For more information, or to submit a profile, contact Lauren Inouye, AACN’s Government Affairs and Grassroots Manager, at linouye@aacn.nche.edu.