Congress Repeals Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate

On April 14, 2015, the Senate passed by a vote of 92-8 the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (H.R. 2) that permanently repeals the Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) and extends funding for the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as well as Community Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps, and Teaching Health Centers programs for two years. Originally introduced in the House by Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX), the bill addresses the issue of Medicare payments to physicians and other Medicare eligible providers, including Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). This legislation is a bipartisan effort to move in this direction as Congress has a long-standing history of passing short-term patches to avoid cuts to Medicare payments.

Since 2003, a total of 17 such patches have been enacted. The legislation repeals the current SGR formula that determines the level of payment that providers receive. Without the patches, this formula would have instituted major cuts to reimbursement (most recently, an approximately 21% cut that would have started April 1, 2015, if H.R. 2 had not passed). As an alternative, the bill locks in current Medicare reimbursement rates through June 2015, at which time rates will increase 0.5% each year from 2016-2019. Another key component of the legislation is that the current fee-for-service reimbursement system is altered by placing emphasis on quality outcomes.

Recently, AACN along with its APRN colleague organizations submitted a letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) urging the passage of H.R. 2, and stressed how as integral members of the healthcare team, APRNs are subject to SGR policies that impact their care delivery to Medicare beneficiaries.

The President is expected to sign the legislation into law. To read past letters of support from AACN and its APRN colleagues, visit AACN’s Government Affairs.

Highlights from AACN’s Spring Advocacy Day

On March 23, 2015, AACN hosted its Spring Advocacy Day which included in-person Hill visits and a virtual call to action. The following highlights the successful collaboration of AACN member deans, faculty, students, and Grassroots Network members. AACN would like to thank its member deans and its Grassroots Network for raising nursing education’s voice on issues that are instrumental to improving the health of America.

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**Virtual Advocacy Day**

Collectively, the Grassroots Network sent **635 messages in response to the Action Alert “One Day, One Voice- Show Congress Academic Nursing is United” to 211 Congressional offices** (141 Representatives; 70 Senators). Grassroots Network Members urged their legislators to cosponsor two pieces of legislation that aim to improve access to care by supporting the APRN practice, namely, the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2015 (H.R. 1342/ S. 578) and the Improving Veterans Access to Quality Care Act of 2015 (H.R. 1247). As our nation’s elderly and veteran populations continue to expand, it is imperative that nurses are recognized as equal members of the healthcare team so that high-quality services are provided in a timely manner. To learn more about these bills, visit AACN Policy Briefs and AACN Supported Legislation.

AACN Grassroots Network members can still request their legislators to cosponsor these bills by taking action here.

**Congressional Hill Visits**

During the afternoon of March 23, nearly 100 AACN member deans as well as nearly 200 baccalaureate and graduate students attending AACN’s Student Policy Summit met with 142 Congressional offices (73 Senate offices; 69 House offices). Representatives were asked to sign a Dear Colleague letter circulated by Rep. Lois Capps, RN, (D-CA) and Rep. Richard Hanna (R-NY) requesting strong support for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. Senators were asked to sign a Dear Colleague letter circulated by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) requesting $244 million for Title VIII.

The House Dear Colleague letter received 73 signatures; the Senate Dear Colleague letter received 31 signatures.

The second request AACN members took to the hill was to support the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR, National Institutes of Health) at $150 million in FY 2016. Senators were asked to sign a Dear Colleague letter circulated by Sen. Robert Casey (D-PA) and Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) requesting a strong commitment to funding for NIH in FY 2016. There were 54 Senators who signed onto the letter. AACN members also asked their legislators to cosponsor H.R. 1342/S. 578 and H.R. 1247. AACN sincerely thanks its members for meeting with their legislators and staff to educate Congress on the importance of these programs and their impact on the healthcare workforce and delivery system. A special thank you to AACN State Grassroots Liaisons for coordinating Hill visits for their state delegations.

**AACN Honors Representative David Joyce at Congressional Reception**

On the evening of March 23, AACN hosted a Congressional Reception on Capitol Hill in collaboration with House Nursing Caucus Co-Chairs Representative Lois Capps, RN, (D-CA) and Representative David Joyce (R-OH). The reception was a valuable opportunity for AACN deans, Faculty Policy Intensive fellows, and Student Policy Summit attendees to network with Congressional staff. AACN was pleased to welcome Members of Congress who showed their support for nursing, including Representatives Lois Capps (D-CA), Rodney Davis (R-IL), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), David Joyce (R-OH), and Walter Jones (R-NC), who attended the
reception and met with nursing constituents from their state and across the country.

Rep. David Joyce was honored at the reception with AACN’s 2015 Congressional Appreciation Award for his unwavering dedication to supporting policies that advance the profession’s role in delivering high-quality care. Rep. Joyce began his term as the Nursing Caucus Co-Chair in February 2013 and has consistently collaborated in a bipartisan fashion with his Co-Chair, Rep. Lois Capps, to lead the House Nursing Caucus. He willingly stepped into this role at the beginning of his freshman term in Congress and has become one of nursing’s strongest supporters in the House. AACN’s Ohio State Grassroots Liaisons, Dr. Greer Glazer, Dean of the University of Cincinnati College of Nursing and Dr. Faye Grund, Dean of Ashland University College of Nursing & Health Sciences, presented the award alongside fellow deans and students from Ohio.

Dr. Mary Burman Named AACN’s Advocate of the Year

At AACN’s Spring Annual Meeting, Government Affairs Committee (GAC) Chair Dr. Anita Hufft presented Dr. Mary Burman, Dean of the University of Wyoming Fay W. Whitney School of Nursing, with AACN’s 2014 Advocate of the Year Award. This award is granted annually to one AACN member whose outstanding efforts to advance nursing education, practice, and research deserve special recognition.

Dr. Burman has been a long-standing advocate for the nursing profession and has displayed consistent dedication to AACN’s advocacy initiatives to improve health care in our nation. She was the top responder to AACN Action Alerts, which request Members of Congress to support policies consistent with AACN’s federal policy agenda. She previously held an appointment on AACN’s Government Affairs Committee, and as the sole AACN member in Wyoming, has provided the association with years of service as a State Grassroots Liaison. Through her efforts to amplify AACN’s collective voice, she is an inspiration to her colleagues, her faculty, and her students.
Dr. Margaret Faut Callahan Appointed to NIH Interagency Pain Research Coordinating Committee

Margaret Faut Callahan, CRNA, PhD, FNAP, FAAN, was recently appointed to the National Institutes of Health Interagency Pain Research Coordinating Committee (IPRCC) Working Group on Professional Education and Training. The IPRCC is a federal advisory committee created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to enhance pain research efforts and promote collaboration across the government, with the ultimate goals of advancing the fundamental understanding of pain and improving pain-related treatment strategies.

Dr. Faut Callahan served as Treasurer of the AACN Board of Directors from 2012 to 2015. She is currently the Interim Provost and Dean and Professor of Nursing at Marquette University.

AACN’s Sixth Annual Student Policy Summit Welcomed Record Attendance

AACN hosted its sixth annual Student Policy Summit March 22-24, 2015 in Washington, DC. The Summit welcomed 185 students, representing 97 schools from 40 states the nation. This three-day conference convened undergraduate and graduate students from AACN member institutions in our nation’s capital to learn about the legislative process and to engage in advocacy on behalf of America’s health. The students heard from an array of healthcare policy experts, including Dr. Patricia Grady, Director of the National Institute of Nursing Research, Dr. Julie Schokalski, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Nursing, former Congressman Kenny Hulshof, and Bess Evans, Associate Director at the White House Office of Public Engagement.

On the second day of the Summit, the students accompanied the deans from their state attending the Spring Annual Meeting on Congressional office visits to advocate for the association’s education, research, and practice priorities. The students were inducted into the Student Policy Summit Academy by AACN’s President Eileen Breslin during the program’s closing ceremony.

AACN is grateful to have the support of the editors of the award-winning book, Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care, Diana J. Mason, Judith K. Leavitt, Mary W. Chaffee, and its publisher, Elsevier, who are sponsoring the 2015 AACN Student Grassroots Prize. This new initiative will provide $500 each to three exceptional attendees of the 2015 Student Policy Summit who have created a project that engages individuals toward a common local, state, or federal policy effort. AACN would like to thank its generous sponsors for making the 2015 Student Policy Summit a great success:

**Platinum Level:**
University of Oklahoma Health Science Center School of Nursing
Jonas Center for Nursing and Veterans Healthcare
Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing’s Future

**Gold Level:**
Michigan State University College of Nursing

**Bronze Level:**
Np2Be
University of Missouri, Kansas City School of Nursing and Health Studies
AACN Inducts Eight Faculty Members as FPI Fellows

AACN congratulates the 2015 class of Faculty Policy Intensive (FPI) Fellows upon completion of a four-day policy program in Washington, DC. The AACN FPI program sponsored eight faculty members from a competitive pool of applicants to convene in our nation’s capital and meet with nursing and healthcare policy leaders from Congress, the Administration, and the private sector. These FPI Fellows will continue to collaborate with AACN to help inform the association’s advocacy efforts.

AACN extends a warm congratulations to: Dr. Jane Campbell, Northern Michigan University; Dr. Mai Kung, Florida State University; Dr. Patsy Cornelius, University of Arkansas Fort Smith; Dr. David LaFevers, University of Missouri-Kansas City; Dr. Amanda Fallin, University of Kentucky; Dr. Janice Miller, Thomas Jefferson University; Dr. Eileen Fry-Bowers, Loma Linda University; and Dr. Suzanne Staebler, Emory University.

Call For Nominations: Members to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) seeks nominations for new members to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications. Members serve a four-year term and are appointed by the director of AHRQ.

Qualified applicants and nominees must, at a minimum, demonstrate knowledge, expertise, and national leadership in the following areas:

1. The critical evaluation of research published in peer reviewed literature and in the methods of evidence review.
2. Clinical prevention, health promotion, and primary health care.
3. Implementation of evidence-based recommendations in clinical practice, including at the clinician-patient level, practice level, and health system level.

The Task Force benefits from members with expertise in the following areas:
- Behavioral medicine
- Public health
- Health equity and the reduction of health disparities
- Application of science to health policy
- Communication of scientific findings to multiple audiences, including health care professionals, policymakers, and the general public

New AHRQ Resources Help Primary Care Practices Engage in Quality Improvement Activities

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has released two new resources to help primary care practices engage in Quality Improvement (QI) activities in a continuous and effective way.

*Engaging Primary Care Practices in Quality Improvement: Strategies for Practice Facilitators* provides a framework on how to engage primary care practices in QI and a number of practical strategies to help practice facilitators address important challenges.

*Using Health Information Technology to Support Quality Improvement in Primary Care* shares lessons learned from experts in fields such as health IT, clinical practice, primary care transformation, and human factors engineering, as well as from representatives of three primary care organizations who have made exemplary use of health IT for QI.

For general information and resources related to primary care transformation and improvement, please visit AHRQ’s [Improving Primary Care Practice pages](http://www.ahrq.gov/).

**Take Action through AACN’s Grassroots Network**

As a member of AACN’s Grassroots Network, individuals receive Policy Beat, receive notifications to participate in AACN’s Action Alerts, and are kept apprised of current policy issues and funding opportunities of relevance to nursing deans, faculty, students, and practicing nurses.

You can encourage your students and colleagues to join AACN’s Grassroots Network by visiting: [http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/take-action](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/take-action). Currently, there are over 12,000 members in the network. Every voice counts!