AACN Invited to White House Ceremony Addressing Student Loan Debt

On Monday, June 9, 2014, AACN President Eileen T. Breslin was invited to the White House to attend a special briefing with President Barack Obama, who announced enhancements to federal programs aimed to help alleviate student loan debt. The Administration announced that it will take action to lift the burden of debilitating student loans to ensure equality in education for all.

During the proceedings, the President signed a memorandum directing the Secretary of Education to propose regulations that would expand the Pay As You Earn plan. The memorandum would allow nearly five million additional federal direct student loan borrowers the opportunity to cap their student loan payments at 10% of their income. This expansion would include borrowers who took out loans prior to October 2007 or have not taken out loans since October 2011.

The Presidential Memorandum also outlines a series of new executive actions aimed to support federal student loan borrowers, especially for vulnerable borrowers who may be at greater risk of defaulting on their loans. Additionally, the President named six areas in which the Department of Education will focus efforts to help decrease debt burden for students:

- Strengthen incentives for loan contractors to serve students well
- Ensure active-duty military get the relief they are entitled to
- Work with the private sector to promote awareness of repayment options
- Explore alternate ways to communicate with federal loan borrowers
- Use innovative communication strategies to help vulnerable borrowers
- Promote stronger collaboration to improve information for students and families

Representatives from the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and the American Nurses Association also attended to lend their support of the Administration’s initiative. AACN will continue to update the membership as our association continues to advocate for students through higher education policy. For more information regarding the proposed steps to alleviate student debt, read the White House’s fact sheet here: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/09/factsheet-making-student-loans-more-affordable.
Sylvia Mathews Burwell Confirmed as Secretary of HHS

On Thursday, June 5, 2014, by a bipartisan vote of 78-17, the Senate confirmed President Obama’s nomination of Sylvia Mathews Burwell as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Senate Finance Committee had approved her nomination earlier in May. Ms. Burwell is replacing outgoing HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, who announced her resignation in April 2014.

Ms. Burwell has held prior leadership roles in the economic and policy arenas, including past presidencies at the Walmart Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Global Development Program, service as Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Chief of Staff to the Secretary of the Treasury, and Staff Director of the National Economic Council. AACN sent letters supporting Ms. Burwell’s nomination and congratulating her upon her confirmation to this role. AACN expressed the association’s interest in continuing to collaborate with HHS to improve the health of patients across the country.

FY 2015 Appropriations Update: Senate LHHS-ED Subcommittee Propose FY 2015 Funding Levels

On June 10, 2014, the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) Subcommittee on Appropriations marked up and approved by voice vote their Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 bill. The bill included a total of $156.773 billion in base discretionary funding. It is reported that the subcommittee recommends $236.294 million for the Nursing Workforce Development Programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act) which reflects a nearly 6% increase over FY 2014 levels. For the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR), the subcommittee proposed $142.209 million, which is a 1.2% increase over FY 2014. For more information, visit AACN’s appropriations advocacy. AACN, along with its colleagues in the Nursing Community, a coalition of 62 national professional nursing organizations, requested $251 million for the Title VIII programs and $150 million for NINR in FY 2015.

The full Senate Appropriations Committee must now mark up and approve the spending package. This process has been postponed for the time being. AACN will continue to keep its members apprised as developments unfold.

Read the Senate LHHS-ED Subcommittee’s press release on the bill summary.

AACN Expresses Support for VHA’s Recommendation to Recognize APRNs as Full Practice Providers

AACN, along with 50 other national professional nursing organizations within the Nursing Community coalition, recently submitted a letter to Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson on the Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA) proposal to recognize advance practice registered nurses (APRNs, including nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, certified registered nurse anesthetists and clinical nurse specialists) as full practice providers within VHA facilities. Our organizations believe this would help ensure timely delivery of high-quality services to our nation’s servicemen and women. Moreover, acknowledging APRNs with full practice authority supports these clinicians to provide services to the full extent of their education and training. Comprised of 62 national professional nursing associations, the Nursing Community convenes to advance policies that improve the health of our nation through the nursing profession.
Enrollment Updates on the Health Insurance Marketplace

The following information regarding Marketplace enrollment may be of interest to AACN members:

*Individuals Qualifying for a Special Enrollment Period*
While the open enrollment period for 2014 Marketplace coverage ended March 31, 2014, there are still options for individuals to qualify for a Special Enrollment Period. Examples of life events that would qualify for special enrollment include having a baby, getting married, losing current health insurance, and exceptional circumstances. For a full list of qualifications of special enrollment and how to enroll, please visit: [https://www.healthcare.gov/how-can-i-get-coverage-outside-of-open-enrollment/#part=2](https://www.healthcare.gov/how-can-i-get-coverage-outside-of-open-enrollment/#part=2).

*For College Students*
New graduates may qualify to enroll in the next upcoming Open Enrollment Period (November 15, 2014 through February 15, 2015), or may be able to get coverage outside of the Open Enrollment Period if they lose current coverage (such as student health insurance). Currently, graduates under age 26 also have the option to receive coverage through their parents’ plan.


*For COBRA Enrollees*
HHS has announced that until July 1, 2014, consumers currently enrolled in the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) may qualify for a Special Enrollment Period to participate in a Marketplace plan. COBRA allows persons who leave or lose their job to keep the job-based health insurance coverage for up to 18 months, with all fees now endured by the insured person. An individual with COBRA that does not wish to enter the Special Enrollment Period will not have the opportunity to gain insurance through the Marketplace until their COBRA plan expires.

Those interested in this Special Enrollment Period are instructed to contact the Marketplace Call Center, at 1-800-318-2596, to confirm eligibility and to be given a list of plans available to them. More information is available at [https://www.healthcare.gov/what-if-i-currently-have-cobra-coverage/](https://www.healthcare.gov/what-if-i-currently-have-cobra-coverage/).

AACN Submits Comments to the FTC on Healthcare Competition

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently hosted a public workshop, *Examining Health Care Competition*, and invited public comment on current developments relating to:

- professional regulation of healthcare providers;
- innovations in healthcare delivery;
- advancements in healthcare technology;
- measuring and assessing healthcare quality; and
- price transparency of healthcare services.

AACN responded to this call for public input and submitted comments on the professional regulation of healthcare providers. The comments commended the FTC for its work to protect the public through critical analysis of barriers to fair trade healthcare practices and to facilitate discussion on these issues through the workshop and public comment period. AACN supports the removal of barriers which prevent APRNs from practicing the full extent of their education and training and limit competition in the healthcare arena. For more information on AACN’s APRN advocacy work, click [here](#).
New Funding Available for Community Health Centers

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) announced this month that $300 million in additional funding will be made available for federally funded Community Health Centers to expand access to comprehensive primary care services to medically underserved populations. The funds may be used to increase service hours, providers, medical services, and expand care areas to include oral health, behavioral health, pharmacy, and/or vision services.

These new funds are a result of the Affordable Care Act’s provisions to expand access to primary care services to all Americans, thereby increasing the health of the nation and reducing healthcare costs resulting from emergency room visits and untreated chronic conditions. Health centers represent a vital link to care, especially for those in rural areas where over half of these centers are located. These health centers have added 2,400 new full-time positions for nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and certified nurse-midwives and 2,700 for nurses since 2008. The deadline to apply for funds is July 1, 2014. For more information on applying for the funds, click here.

AHRQ Reports Reveal Improvements in Health Care Quality and Trends in Disparities

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) recently released results from its 2013 National Healthcare Quality Report and National Healthcare Disparities Report, which reveal that health care quality is improving in a number of categories. According to AHRQ’s press release, “Americans are receiving recommended medical services 70 percent of the time. The reports include data based on hundreds of health care measures categorized in several areas of quality. These are effectiveness, patient safety, timeliness, patient-centeredness, care coordination, efficiency, health system infrastructure and access.” The reports include “trend data for most measures of quality and disparities from 2000-2002 to 2010-2011, which predate implementation of most of the Medicaid expansions and health insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. The reports provide a baseline for tracking progress under the Affordable Care Act in upcoming years.”

National Center on Health Statistics Releases Report on U.S. Birth Trends

A new report Births: Preliminary Data for 2013, from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) shows continuing declines in teen, non-marital, and pre-term birth rates in 2013. Data gathered from the National Vital Statistics System includes information from birth certificates filed in all states and compiled into national statistics.

Key findings from the report include:
- In 2013, the preliminary number of births for the United States was 3,957,577, slightly more than in 2012 (3,952,841).
- The birth rate for teens fell to 26.6 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19, down ten percent from 2012 and a historic low for the nation.
- The birth rate for women aged 20-29 also declined in 2013. The rate was down two percent for women aged 20-24 and down less than one percent for women aged 25-29.
- Birth rates rose for women aged 30-49.
- The preterm birth rate continued to decline in 2013, falling to 11.38% from 11.55% in 2012.
- There was a small decline in the cesarean delivery rate in 2013, to 32.7% of all births (down from 32.8% in 2012).

The NCHS’s mission is “to provide statistical information that will guide actions and policies to improve the health of the American people. As the nation's principal health statistics agency, NCHS leads the way with accurate, relevant, and timely data.” Learn more about the NCHS here.