House Moves on 21st Century Cures Act Legislation

On May 14, 2015, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health unanimously approved the 21st Century Cures Act. The full Energy and Commerce Committee plans to vote on the legislation on May 21. This comprehensive policy proposal targets improving the delivery of research and innovation on several fronts, including an emphasis on additional investments in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) over a multi-year period. More specifically, the Cures Act would reauthorize NIH from Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 through FY 2018 and create an NIH Innovation Fund to support biomedical research through the funding of basic, translational, and clinical research.

Other components of the bill are aimed at strengthening the processes surrounding biomedical cures, which—according to an Energy and Commerce Committee statement—include:

- Discovery of clues in basic science;
- Streamlining the drug and device development process; and
- Unleashing the power of digital medicine and social media at the treatment delivery phase.

These three themes, “discovery,” “development,” and “delivery,” form the foundational tripod of the committee’s 21st Century Cures Discussion Document outlining the priorities to bolster these areas. Included among them are initiatives to support young emerging scientists, including nurse researchers, through NIH Loan Repayment Programs. Additionally, the bill promotes pediatric research through NIH, calls upon the Food and Drug Administration to assist in the development of precision drugs and biological products, and to support the efforts of the Energy and Commerce Bipartisan Telehealth Member Working Group around adoption of new technologies that improve quality of care and fiscal integrity.

Since its inception, the 21st Century Cures Act has received strong bipartisan support. During last week’s subcommittee hearing, Energy and Commerce Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) commented, “Today, we write the prologue to a new chapter in health and hope. We begin to usher in a new era of collaboration and innovation among the researchers and regulators, the patients and physicians, who hold the key to cures. There is no cause more worthy, no challenge more urgent.” Ranking Member Diana DeGette (D-CO) noted, “This bill does so much more. It invests in advancing research to foster the future of science, it modernizes clinical trials, it encourages improvements in the drug and device approval process, it supports the development of new drugs and devices to address areas of unmet need, and it advances the important concept of precision medicine.”

AACN submitted comments to Chairman Upton earlier this year applauding the 21st Century Cure Consortium Act and 21st Century Cure Chronic Disease Initiative Act and described how nurse scientists contribute to the development of patient-centered solutions. AACN also commended the legislation’s goals of propelling the next generation of emerging scientists, including those supported through the National Institute of Nursing Research, and...
emphasized the importance of provider-neutral language throughout the discussion draft to ensure the full cadre of applicable clinicians are captured in these new and exciting initiatives.

For more information, visit the House Energy and Commerce Committee website.

**Senate Forms New NIH Caucus**

On May 5, Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) established the Senate National Institutes of Health (NIH) Caucus to “restore the purchasing power that NIH has lost and provide steady, predictable growth for biomedical research in the future.” As the nation’s leading biomedical research agency, NIH relies on critical support from Congress to sustain the development of life-saving, cross-cutting discoveries that improve the lives of Americans and individuals across the world. NIH funds research across the healthcare spectrum, including nursing science through the National Institute of Nursing Research. However, some legislators are concerned about the NIH’s diminishing purchasing power and the ability of the agency to remain a global competitor.

On May 19, the caucus hosted a briefing on Capitol Hill with NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins. AACN staff attended to hear Dr. Collins and Senators Durbin and Graham discuss how the caucus intends to support the innovative work NIH researchers develop as well as the potential growth for public-private partnerships with the agency to ensure that discoveries are efficiently translated into public benefit. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) who sits on the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee discussed the impact of federal funding trends on NIH.

*Ask Your Senator to Join Today!*  
AACN recently sent a call to action to its Grassroots Network urging members to ask their Senators to join this caucus. You can ask your Senator to join by taking action through AACN’s online advocacy center here.

**AACN Campaign to Highlight Emerging Scientists**

Are you a nurse or nursing student currently working on a research project? Are you early in your research career? Is your research project currently funded by a federal grant? AACN is looking for you!

Nursing research is an essential part of scientific endeavors to improve our nation’s health. Nurse scientists are principal investigators and co-investigators on many large groundbreaking clinical trials, often working in strong interprofessional teams on some of the most complex diseases processes and treatment discoveries. It is time to share this knowledge with the broader healthcare community: by sharing your hard work!

Interested nurse researchers should send a short description of their project, funding source, implications for practice settings, and a photo, to AACN’s Government Affairs Assistant, Leeza Constantoulakis, lconstant@aacn.nche.edu. Researcher profiles will be featured in AACN’s new campaign *Emerging Scientists* coming this fall. AACN and faculty, please encourage your students to submit a description. We are look for a profile from all fifty states and the District of Columbia.
The AACN Student Policy Summit will be opening registration for next year’s conference starting on Monday, October 12, 2015. Due to the overwhelming interest in the Summit, a waitlist has been generated each year for the past two conferences. The Summit, which convenes baccalaureate and graduate nursing students from AACN member schools in Washington, DC, offers attendees a three-day experience to learn from nursing and healthcare’s leading policy experts. In addition, students make Hill visits with AACN member deans/directors to discuss priorities for nursing education, research, and practice that contribute to the national healthcare dialogue.

Given the high demand for registration and limited availability (200 slots), a two-student limit per AACN school will be instituted for the 2016 registration process. Registration is first-come, first-serve, and students must have acquired dean approval to register. Please visit [http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/student-policy-summit](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/student-policy-summit) for more information about the program. If you have further questions, please contact Lauren Inouye at Linouye@aacn.nche.edu or Brandon Azevedo at Bazevedo@aacn.nche.edu.

**FY 2016 Report Language Highlights VHA’s Proposal for APRN Practice**

On April 30, the House of Representatives passed by a vote of 255 to 163 the Military Construction, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY 2016 (H.R. 2029). The bill’s accompanying report from the House Appropriations Committee included language surrounding the Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA) proposal to grant Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) full practice authority in its Nursing Handbook. The language reads:

> The Committee understands that the VHA Nursing Handbook is currently under review. The Committee encourages VHA to seek input from internal VA program offices and external professional stakeholders, prior to possible regulatory action and submission to the Under Secretary for Health for final approval. The Committee believes all possible outreach efforts should be used to communicate the proposed changes, to gather public comment, and to collaborate with Congress, stakeholders, VA nursing staff, and external organizations. Finally, the Committee requests that VHA ensure that any changes to handbooks within VHA do not conflict with other handbooks already in place within VHA.

This proposal has been a cornerstone of AACN’s advocacy work to support APRNs to the full extent of their education and training, and the Committee’s recognition of the importance for its timely evaluation is critical. AACN and its APRN colleagues are working to educate the Department, Congress, and the public on how this momentous proposal would help ensure Veterans access to high-quality care in a timely manner, particularly in primary care and in rural and underserved communities. To view the association’s work surrounding this proposal, visit [APRN Advocacy](#).

**Medicare: 50 Years of Ensuring Coverage and Care**

This July 30 marks the 50th anniversary of the Social Security Amendments of 1965 being signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. These amendments, which created the Medicare and Medicaid programs, have helped ensure access to health care for millions of vulnerable individuals, including the elderly, women and children, and patients with disabilities.
Over the years, the programs have expanded its services to include hospice benefits and prescription drug benefit (Part D). Medicare also plays a critical role in alleviating spending costs for long-term and short-term nursing home care, and skilled nursing facility services.

Visit the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](https://www.cms.gov) for more information on eligibility and coverage.

To learn more about the history and accomplishments of Medicare over the past five decades, visit the Commonwealth Fund’s “[Medicare 50 Years of Ensuring Coverage and Care](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-report/2015/may/medicare-50-years-ensuring-coverage-care)” and “[50 Years of Medicare: How Did We Get Here?](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-report/2015/may/50-years-medicare-how-did-we-get-here)”

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**May is National Mental Health Awareness Month!**

Through a [Presidential Proclamation](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-declaring-may-national-mental-health-awareness-month-2015/), President Barack Obama has recognized May as National Mental Health Awareness Month. In his statement, the President calls upon “citizens, government agencies, organizations, healthcare providers, and research institutions to raise mental health awareness and continue helping Americans live longer, healthier lives.” With millions of Americans suffering with mental illness, it is critical that they access to quality, affordable care. National Mental Health Awareness month is dedicated to shining a light on the impact of mental illness and stand with those who are affected by it.

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**Call for Nominations: AACN Policy Luminary Award**

Each year, AACN recognizes an outstanding nursing leader whose significant contributions in the policy arena advance the nursing profession and America’s health. Presented to this individual at AACN’s Fall Semiannual Meeting, the Policy Luminary Award has highlighted some of nursing’s most prominent leaders. Past recipients have included:

- Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN, Acting Deputy Administrator of the Department of Health and Human Services;
- Mary Naylor, PhD, RN, FAAN, the Marian S. Ware Professor of Gerontology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing;
- Ellen-Marie Whelan, PhD, CRNP, FAAN, Senior Advisor at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovations;
- Ada Sue Hinshaw, PhD, RN, FAAN, the first director of the National Institute of Nursing Research at the National Institutes of Health; and
- Marilyn Tavenner, MHA, RN, former Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.
- Representative Lois Capps, RN (D-CA), Co-Chair and Founder of the House Nursing Caucus

AACN’s Government Affairs Committee is now seeking nominations for this year’s award. Please submit nominations by 5:00pm ET on Monday, June 15, 2015. Each nomination package should include two letters of recommendation from peers, the nominee’s CV, and a one page bio-sketch. Materials should be submitted to AACN’s Associate Director for Government Affairs, Lauren Inouye at Linouye@aacn.nche.edu.

For more information on the Policy Luminary Award, including nominee criteria, see: [http://www.aacn.nche.edu/membership/awards/CallforNomPolicy.pdf](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/membership/awards/CallforNomPolicy.pdf)