The American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s (AACN) Government Affairs Committee (GAC) and staff are excited to announce their new monthly newsletter AACN Policy Beat. This detailed announcement will come out mid-month and discuss hot topics on Capitol Hill related to nursing education and research. Sent through our online advocacy tool Capwiz, we will be able to reach all of AACN’s nursing advocates.

As a part of the launch for the first AACN Policy Beat, we encourage you to forward this message to your faculty and students so they can register to be a part of AACN’s grassroots network! AACN’s membership includes over 640 schools, 270,000 students, and 14,000 faculty members. Imagine the difference we could make on Capitol Hill with nearly 290,000 strong, passionate, and dedicated nurses weighing in on policy issues. Again, please forward the link below to your faculty and student list serves encouraging them to be a part of something big— improving federal policy for nursing education and research.

Healthcare Reform: The AACN Update

Before Congress adjourned for the August recess, three major healthcare reform packages were fiercely debated in both the House and Senate. The first package released to the public in June was the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee’s Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009, which was reported out of committee but not officially introduced before Congress adjourned. According to the latest reports, the Senate HELP Committee plans to merge their bill with the Senate Finance Committee’s legislation. While details of the Senate Finance Committee’s proposal were released to the public with the request for comment, negotiations over a final package were not completed before the August recess and will resume when Congress reconvenes in September. The final major healthcare reform package, the America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009 (H.R. 3200), was introduced on July 31, 2009 as a joint initiative of the House Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Education and Labor Committees.
Though AACN does not take a position on the entirety of these packages, we do support the elements of Senate HELP draft legislation and H.R. 3200 that reauthorize the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs of the Public Health Service Act. Additionally, specific to H.R. 3200, AACN supports the efforts to expand the use of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) in the “medical home model” and the expansion of reimbursement for Certified Nurse Midwives, among others.

For more information on healthcare reform and the proposals discussed above, see: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/npb.htm

During the remainder of the August recess, AACN strongly encourages you to meet with your members of Congress back in the district. As nursing leaders, it is important to raise the awareness on such issues as the barriers within nursing education, the role of APRNs in team-based healthcare, and the damaging impact a limited scope of practice plays in an APRN’s ability to provide cost-effective quality care. You can offer to host your Legislator and their staff at your nursing school to discuss issues important to your school and practice partners.

Now and in future healthcare reform discussions, AACN will continue to work with our colleagues in the nursing community to advance provisions that support nursing education, research, and other important practice issues. At present, AACN would like to raise your attention to two critical issues we need your help advocating for in the final healthcare reform legislation.

**AACN’s Healthcare Reform Priority: Graduate Nursing Education Funding Proposal**

AACN has been working with our colleagues in the advanced practice community and AARP to develop a proposal that would provide a dedicated funding stream through Medicare to support the clinical education of APRNs. To move this initiative forward, Representative Lois Capps (D-CA) and Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) have introduced companion legislation (H.R. 3185 and S. 1569) that would reimburse hospitals and community-based care settings, in collaboration with accredited schools of nursing, for both direct and indirect costs associated with APRN clinical education. AACN feels this legislation is critical to the discussions around healthcare reform. APRNs are ideally suited to help implement delivery system reforms such as an increased focus on primary, transitional, and preventive care, enhancing access for rural and medically underserved populations, improving care coordination, chronic care management, and reducing costly medical errors. Please watch for an upcoming AACN Action Alert regarding this legislation. The inclusion of this bill in the final healthcare reform legislation depends upon a number of factors, but the number of Congressional co-sponsors is critical. The only way to gain these co-sponsors is for them to hear from their constituents!
AACN’s Healthcare Reform Priority: The Nurse Education Expansion and Development (NEED) Act

As you are well aware, the NEED Act is a crucial piece of legislation that will offer nursing schools flexible funding to hire, recruit, and retain faculty, as well as expand infrastructure, among other objectives. AACN has supported this legislation since 2003 and NOW is the opportune moment to move this legislation through healthcare reform. AACN has sent out two alerts via our online advocacy tool, Capwiz, encouraging users to contact their Senators and request that they co-sponsor S. 497, the NEED Act. These alerts only generated about 50 messages total. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation for nursing education currently under consideration and we NEED your help to pass the NEED Act. To take action now, click on this link. http://capwiz.com/aacn/issues/alert/?alertid=13718161

Title VIII House and Senate Appropriations Update

The House concluded their work on the Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS), Education and Related Agencies’ appropriations bill (H.R. 3293) on July 24, 2009 when it passed by a 264-153 vote. As previously reported, the House bill provides $263.4 million for the Title VIII programs with increases provided to the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) and the Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program. See: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/pdf/FY10ChartHouse.pdf

The Senate Appropriations Committee passed their LHHS appropriations bill on July 30, 2009 with a vote of 29-1. The Senate version of the bill includes $217 million for the Title VIII programs with significant increases in the NFLP ($25 million—$13.5 million more than FY 2009) and Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program ($64.1 million). See: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/pdf/FY10ChartSenate.pdf

Given the $46 million difference between the House and Senate version of the LHHS Appropriations bill, AACN will advocate for the conference committee support the House level of $263.4 million and will stress the importance of the Senate’s generous allocation of $25 million to the NFLP.

Photograph by Tonja Hagy
Stimulus News

As you may remember, Congress passed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* early this year. AACN announced at that time that $200 million would be available for health professions education through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). In late July, both HRSA and the Department of Labor made announcements regarding separate grant opportunities that are applicable to schools of nursing and nursing students. Additionally, on July 12, 2009, HRSA announced that $13.4 million will be provided for the Nurse Loan Repayment Program and the Nurse Faculty Loan Program.

For more information on the Stimulus Package, visit:
AACN’s Stimulus Resource Page: [http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/StimulusIndex.htm](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/StimulusIndex.htm)
Department of Labor: [http://www.doleta.gov/grants/find_grants.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/grants/find_grants.cfm)
Health Resources and Services Administration: [http://www.hrsa.gov/grants](http://www.hrsa.gov/grants)

What to Expect from the Government Affairs Committee at the Fall Meeting

The GAC has been hard at work planning for the Fall Semiannual Meeting and 40th Anniversary celebration. Below is a list of activities:

- **Saturday, October 31, 2009** from 6:00-7:00 pm the Committee will host an event for new and returning State Grassroots Liaisons.
- **Monday, November 2, 2009** from 7:15-7:50 am the Committee will host an Informal Breakfast Discussion for all attendees on *Preparing for Your Capitol Hill Visits*.
- **Monday, November 2, 2009** from 1:00-4:00 pm AACN members are encouraged to make Capitol Hill visits. A bus service will be provided to and from the JW Marriott to Capitol Hill.
- Additionally, your visits will be followed by a Congressional Reception from 4:30-6:30pm in the elegant Gold Room of the Rayburn House Office Building.
- Stay tuned for more information regarding the GAC session on Tuesday, November 3, 2009.

Make Your Hill Appointments Now

It’s not too soon to begin scheduling your Capitol Hill visits for Monday, November 2, 2009. Your State Grassroots Liaisons will plan Senate visits for your state delegation. However, you should begin scheduling your meeting with your member of the House of Representatives. Please visit AACN’s Legislative Resource Center at [http://capwiz.com/aacn/home/](http://capwiz.com/aacn/home/) for help in identifying and contacting your members of Congress.