Healthcare Reform: The AACN Update

**AACN is a nonpartisan organization. While AACN supports many provisions in the current healthcare reform proposals circulating, the organization does not take an official stance on the entirety of any one bill or proposal. The information below provides both an overview of current activities at the federal level and AACN’s position on various provisions.**

After an August recess where healthcare reform was vehemently debated by the public and federal policy makers, Congress reconvened in early September and placed the issue at the forefront of the legislative agenda. In an act to demonstrate his commitment to reforming the healthcare system, President Obama addressed a joint session of Congress on Wednesday, September 9, 2009 to discuss his plan. Health insurance reform was cited by the President as a major priority. The President stated in this address that, “Since health care represents one-sixth of our economy, I believe it makes more sense to build on what works and fix what doesn’t, rather than try to build an entirely new system from scratch.” The President’s plan is structured to meet three goals 1) “security and stability to those who have health insurance;” 2) “insurance for those who don’t;” and 3) “slow the growth of health care costs for our families, our businesses, and our government.”

For more information on the President’s address and plan see:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/health_care/

For more information on the Republicans response to and alternatives for the current healthcare plans under consideration see:
http://www.gop.gov/solutions/healthcare

Shortly after the President’s address, the Senate Finance Committee Chair, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) announced the America’s Healthy Future Act of 2009 on Wednesday, September 16, 2009. The legislation includes provisions such as tax credits for low- and middle-income families to purchase healthcare insurance in the private market, Medicare and Medicaid incentives for completing healthy lifestyle programs, an investment in the primary care workforce, and Medicare incentives to reward quality care. Republican Senators have expressed concern that when this bill is merged with the Senate Health, Labor, Education, and Pensions (HELP) bill, some of the negotiations may not stay in place.

For more information on this plan see:
The release of the Senate Finance Community bill provides an opportunity for AACN, our colleagues in the advanced practice community, and AARP to continue our work on the Medicare Graduate Nursing Education Act of 2009 (S.1569) introduced by Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), a member of the Senate Finance Committee. As noted in last month’s Policy Beat, the legislation would provide a dedicated funding stream through Medicare to support the clinical education of APRNs. AACN applauds Sen. Stabenow’s commitment to this important legislation. On Friday, September 18, 2009 she filed S. 1569 as an amendment to the America’s Healthy Future Act of 2009.

AACN was thrilled when Chairman Baucus included a Graduate Nursing Education program as a demonstration program in his Chairman’s mark on September 22, 2009. While this is only one of many steps in the process, the recognition of this proposal is momentous for APRN education and AACN will continue to work with Sen. Stabenow and our colleagues to move this initiative forward.

For more information on this legislation see:  
http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/SupportedLegislation.htm

AACN continues to support the inclusion of the Nurse Education Expansion and Development (NEED) Act (S. 497) in the final healthcare reform package. Since 2003, AACN has supported this important legislation, which will offer nursing schools flexible funding to hire, recruit, and retain faculty, as well as expand infrastructure, among other objectives. In order to move this legislation through healthcare reform, it is critical that additional Senators sign on to co-sponsor S. 497.

Please consider taking action today by sending a message to your Senator using this link:  
http://capwiz.com/aacn/issues/alert/?alertid=13718161

As Congress continues to debate and deliberate healthcare reform, AACN will keep you apprised of important information on this issue.

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

**House and Senate Appropriations Update**

As reported in last month’s Policy Beat, the House passed the Labor, Health, and Human Services (LHHS) Appropriations bill in late July. The Senate has yet to take their LHHS Appropriations bill to the floor. AACN, along with over 45 nursing organizations, will write to the House and Senate Conference Committee members requesting the highest possible funding level for each of the Title VIII programs. On September 28, 2009 the House passed a continuing resolution (217-190 vote) to keep the federal government running until they can
pass the final FY 2010 appropriations bills. The new fiscal year begins on October 1, 2009. The Senate is likely to take up the continuing resolution on September 29, 2009.

For more information on funding levels for the Title VIII programs and other federal programs of interest see:

House Passed LHHS Appropriations Bill

Senate Appropriations Committee Passes LHHS Appropriations Bill

For more information on the Nursing Community see:
http://www.thenursingcommunity.org/

**Stimulus News**

In recent news regarding the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services and Dr. Mary Wakefield, HRSA Administrator announced the release of $33 million to six different HRSA programs including:

- $19.3 million for Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students
- $4.9 million for Centers of Excellence
- $3 million for Public Health Traineeships
- $2.6 million for the Nursing Workforce Diversity
- $2.5 million for Health Careers Opportunities
- $810,925 for Dental Public Health Residency Training

Health Resources and Services Administration:

For more information on this latest release from the Stimulus Package, see:
http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/StimulusIndex.htm

**Constituents Meeting with NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins**

AACN staff attended the Constituents Meeting with newly appointed NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins on September 9, 2009. Dr. Collins spoke about the need to “translate basic science discoveries into new and better treatment, putting science to work for the benefit of healthcare reform, comparative effectiveness research, and encouraging a greater focus on global health.” Additionally, Dr. Collins spoke about how NIH had used ARRA dollars to “stimulate the economy, create and preserve jobs, and advance biomedical research.”
In fact, the NIH Director noted that every grant creates seven new jobs. One of the major components of NIH stimulus dollars was the Challenge Grants. Dr. Collins stated that they expected to receive between 2,000-3,000 applications. However, more than 21,000 grant proposals were submitted and only 3% could be supported by the stimulus dollars—a clear indication that thousands of new and innovative research proposals were left unfunded.

Dr. Collins requested the help of NIH constituents to “have a common and consistent voice in support of the importance of medical research, develop new and compelling ways to describe NIH research to decision makers and the public, and to keep the channels of communication between NIH and our constituents wide open.” For more information regarding the Constituents Meeting see: http://videocast.nih.gov/Summary.asp?File=15263

Advocacy for NIH, and NINR in particular, continues to be a top priority for AACN. New strategies and advocacy materials to promote the important work of NIH and NINR funded nurse researchers are currently being discussed. AACN will continue to keep you informed of our advocacy efforts to address Dr. Collins request for help from NIH constituents.

**Make Your Hill Appointments Now**

Over the last 40 years, advocacy for nursing education and research has been tenet of AACN’s mission. Throughout the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, and in the 2000s, AACN worked alongside other national nursing organizations to see major regulatory improvements and funding increases for the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs. In recent years, AACN’s advocacy efforts were instrumental in securing provisions for nursing students and schools in the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-315) and the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (P.L. 111-5). These legislative successes for nursing would not have been accomplished without the commitment of you, our AACN members.

As you think about your plans to attend the Fall 40th Anniversary Meeting, remember the importance of advocacy. Legislators are committed to their constituents but need to hear directly from them on issues of importance. During a time when healthcare reform is at the forefront of our nation’s legislative agenda, please make it a priority to schedule your Hill visit and support the advocacy goals of nursing education and research. Now is the time for legislators to hear from our nation’s nursing leaders!

Your State Grassroots Liaisons will plan Senate visits for your state delegation on Monday, November 2, 2009. 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/ for help in identifying and contacting your members of Congress.
The Government Affairs Committee (GAC) Plans for the 40th Anniversary Celebration

The GAC is excited to offer a number of events for the Fall 40th Anniversary Meeting. Please take a moment to review the list of activities:

- **Saturday, October 31, 2009, 6:00-7:00 pm** the Committee will host a State Grassroots Liaisons Business meeting.

- **Monday, November 2, 2009, 7:15-7:50 am** the Committee will host an Informal Breakfast Discussion on *Preparing for Your Capitol Hill Visits*.

- **Monday, November 2, 2009, 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.
  - 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, Room 2168.

- **Tuesday, November 3, 2009, 8:30-10:00 am** Government Affairs Committee Chair Dr. Teri Murray will give a retrospective on 40 years of AACN policy work, followed by an address on healthcare reform from The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services.

**Help Create New Nursing Advocates**

The importance and relevance of advocacy at the national level is critical for the profession. Over the years, nursing has grown more engaged in shaping healthcare policy. Yet more work needs to be done. The profession will benefit greatly from a new generation of nurses who are politically active. Consider being a change agent for this progress by having your students and faculty sign up to receive this monthly policy newsletter. Once your faculty and students register, they will receive *AACN’s Policy Beat* and other periodic action alert messages. This information offers an easy entry into the nursing advocacy world. To register, please direct your students and faculty to: [http://capwiz.com/aacn/mlm/signup/](http://capwiz.com/aacn/mlm/signup/)