

Legislative Alert

July/August 2009 Legislative Update

Healthcare Reform's Timeline

Now is the time for AACAP advocates to reach out to US Representatives and Senators demanding health care reform move forward. While Congress is at home for the summer attending bbq's and holiday parades, ask your elected officials to pass the health care bill when they return to Washington. Call, write, email, or make an appointment to meet with your representatives who are interested in hearing from medical experts on this very important national issue. This is a unique opportunity to mention overall health care, and more specifically child and adolescent psychiatry, providing AACAP members the ability to offer your expertise as Congress continues the debate.

As Congress broke for its annual month long summer recess the final touches were being completed on two health bills in different committees from both chambers. President Obama's ambitious timeline has pushed Congress to move his top domestic agenda much faster than they usually care to do, especially on complicated issues.

House

By mid-July, two of three House Committees (Ways & Means and Education & Labor) had completed their sections of the House health care reform bill - H.R. 3200, *American's Affordable Health Choice Act*. It was then up to Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA) to shepherd its debate of expanded coverage and cost savings through his Committee. There were some concerns from the conservative Blue Dog Democrats, about costs, implying resistance to the high public figure associated with paying for reform. Ultimately, those issues were resolved.

During these mark-ups, the House discussed an amendment that included a pediatric specialty loan repayment program. It addressed the national shortage of children's mental health professionals by encouraging more individuals to enter the child and adolescent psychiatric field. While the amendment was withdrawn, Chairman Waxman has made assurances that the committee will address this issue in the future. Finally, on the evening of July 31, Chairman Waxman's committee, largely along a party line vote of 31-28, passed its version of healthcare reform. However, there were about 50-60 amendment that were not considered prior to passage of the bill by the Committee, which will be considered in September. The Committee's version of the bill will have to be reconciled with the other two prior to its consideration by the full House of Representatives.

Senate

The first sign of healthcare reform in the Senate came from a party line vote of the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee on July 15, in the form of *The Affordable Health Choice Act*. Acting Committee Chairman, Chris Dodd (D-

CT) navigated a more than 600 amendment, two week mark-up process in the absence of longtime HELP Chair Edward Kennedy (D-MA). As mentioned in AACAP's June Update, AACAP was successful in securing provisions in the Senate bill that would provide for loan repayments up to \$35,000 annually.

The Senate Finance Committee has yet to produce its bill, as Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) continues bipartisan discussion on issues such as the public option, financing, Medicare – including GME, Medicaid, SCHIP. Once the committee agrees and passes its bill it will have to reconcile with the Senate HELP bill before it is voted on in the Senate.

Once a final bill clears the Senate, it will move to a Conference Committee with the House, and the real work for a compromise bill begins. Allowing for some breathing room will give members of Congress the August recess to hear from constituents about health care reform details. "This is not about beat the clock," HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said, adding the White House is interested in a good bill, not a quick one. If a bill is presented, it likely will occur into the autumn months.

When contacting your Representatives and Senators, please reference elements of this grid. Much of the public discussion centers on these sections of healthcare reform and as the deliberations continue into September and October, Congress will want to hear from AACAP and other health-oriented societies on details. Your input is essential.

To view a side by side of the bills, please click [here](#)

Labor, HHS Appropriations

All of the 12 Appropriations bills were passed by their respective subcommittees in the House and the Senate is expected to have taken up four of the bills before the August recess. Known as the most difficult Appropriations bill, the Labor/HHS section is usually held for mark-up until after most of the other Appropriations bills are complete. Some of the bill's highlights include: IS there a char form MHLG with what they passed?

- \$17 million increase for Children's Mental Health to provide 11,000 additional children who have mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders with community-based care and supports;
- \$31.3 billion for the National Institutes of Health, \$500 million above the Administration's request, ensuring that all institutes and centers receive funding to offset biomedical research inflation;
- \$6.7 billion for Public Health Activities administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a \$38 million increase over the President's request, providing funding efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and to intensify surveillance on emerging infectious diseases like MRSA and influenzas;
- \$3.6 billion for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a \$3 million improvement from the Administration and a \$46 million increase from 2009;

- \$2.2 billion for Community Health Centers, the same as the President's request, to provide primary health care to 17 million patients, of whom 40 % are uninsured, in 7,500 service delivery sites;
- \$530 million in HRSA, that includes the National Health Service Corp, to expand training programs across the health professions and nursing fields;
- \$20 million for Foster Care Innovation, the same as the President's request, for a new initiative to improve the outcomes for children in foster care by providing incentives to states to develop evidence-based improvements for children in long-term care.
- \$135 million for a Career Pathways Innovation Fund in the Labor and Education Departments, of which at least \$65 million will support competitive grants to community colleges and partnerships with local adult education providers to train nurses, medical technicians, and others for skilled jobs in the health industry;
- \$65 million for State High Risk Insurance Pools to subsidize health insurance coverage for almost 200,000 individuals who are medically high-risk and unable to purchase individual health insurance in the commercial market;
- \$8 million increase for State homelessness grants to provide an estimated 11,000 additional homeless and seriously mentally ill individuals with community-based support services; and
- \$7 million increase to double an initiative that integrates primary and behavioral health care for an estimated 3 million Americans with severe mental illnesses.

The Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill was marked-up and approved by voice vote on July 28, to be sent to the full Senate soon. The health section of the bill comes in at \$163.1 billion, just over \$1 billion more than the President requested, and close to the House's already passed \$163.4 billion version of the same bill. As this process moves forward, all eyes will be on Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), who chairs the committee, and is known as someone who champions "causes of farmers, organized labor, the poor, and the disabled." His legislative priorities will guide the committees, and ultimately the Senate's, final appropriations bill.

Additionally, the White House has added \$443 million to the 2010 NIH's \$31 billion budget, but has earmarked \$268 million for cancer research. "Should we put so much of that into just one disease? I know they proposed this, but we may have a different view on that," said Senator Harkin. As the debate rages on later this year, the Senate will hold sway on the funding of considerable areas of healthcare reform. Look for the dynamics to continue to shift in this discussion.

A great deal of media attention, both from journalists and paid commercials, will continue throughout August and into September. Members of Congress and their staff will be listening to the national dialog and will act accordingly. It is imperative that AACAP members contact their Representatives and Senators, telling them to pass this significant legislation. As doctors, your voice is regarded with esteem and so very important to this debate. Let Congress know what you think.

August Recess

The AACAP Department of Government Affairs will be glad to coordinate congressional district office visits for you, including scheduling the meeting, providing you with briefing materials and talking points on the issues and finding other AACAP members/family members to accompany you in a strong children's mental health delegation – all you have to do is attend the meeting!

If you are available to attend a district visit, please contact the AACAP Department of Government Affairs, as visits need to be scheduled in advance. Please contact Pat Jones, AACAP Legislative Coordinator, at pjones@aacap.org or call 800.333.7636, ext. 128, to schedule your district visit today!

Thank You,

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