

American Geriatrics Society

Five Reasons Health Reform Helps Older Americans

Enhances the Geriatrics Workforce

Health care reform will build upon and enhance the geriatrics training programs under Title VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act. These programs train health care professionals to better meet the unique health care needs of older adults. Our nation is facing severe shortages of geriatrics health care workers just as the baby boomers are starting to retire. Without a sufficient number of providers who are trained in geriatrics, many of our nation's older adults will go without the high-quality health care that they need and deserve.

Provides Training for Direct Care Workers and Family Caregivers

Health care reform supports training opportunities and workforce development support for direct care workers in long-term care settings. Currently, there are 3 million direct care workers – with an anticipated 1 million additional workers needed within the next ten years. It will also provide training and support for family caregivers supporting frail elders and individuals with disabilities.

Provides Long Term Care Services and Supports

Health care reform includes provisions from the late Senator Kennedy's CLASS (Community Living Assistance Services and Supports) Act that will allow older Americans with functional disabilities to remain in their homes and communities. By establishing a new voluntary national insurance program this proposal will help adults who have or develop functional impairment to remain independent, employed and stay a part of their communities. Currently there are 10 million Americans in need of long term care services, and the number is expected to increase to near 15 million by 2020.

Supports care coordination and the team approach

Proposed reforms would also expand Medicare coverage to include needed services, such as care coordination for elders with multiple, complex chronic health problems. The Health reform bill will establish an Innovation Center within CMS to test, evaluate, and expand different payment structures and methodologies which aim to foster patient-centered care, improve quality, and slow the rate of Medicare cost growth. The bill also includes provisions to better manage care transitions and care coordination among providers and between settings. Such care has shown reduced preventable hospital re-admissions among older, vulnerable patients and lower costs.

Enhances the Primary Care Workforce

And, equally important, health care reform will expand training to prepare primary care physicians and other healthcare providers to better meet the unique healthcare needs of the aging population. Health care reform will establish a new bonus payment for primary care practitioners -- an important first step toward ameliorating the shortage of primary care providers, including those in geriatric medicine. The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), an independent Congressional agency, reported to Congress that patient access to high-quality primary care is essential for a well-functioning health care delivery system.

Help us to make Health Reform even Better

Visit AGS' Health in Aging Advocacy Center and let your Senators and Representative know that you support Health Care Reform <http://capwiz.com/geriatrics/home/>

Also, Contact Congress Today and Urge them to add Provisions that would:

Provide Loan Forgiveness for Professional Training in Geriatrics

A crucial omission in the bill is a program to establish a loan forgiveness program for health care professionals entering the field of geriatrics. Given the diminishing supply of health care professionals trained to meet the unique needs of older patients, we ask *you* to urge Congress to support the inclusion of language proposed by Senator Boxer to establish a loan forgiveness program for geriatrics health professionals. The language, from Senator Boxer's Caring for an Aging America Act (S. 750), would help to address clinician and faculty shortages by providing for loan forgiveness for those who complete training in geriatrics or gerontology and who work full-time for at least two years in a geriatrics setting.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) is a 6,700-member, not-for-profit association of geriatrics healthcare professionals. The Society is dedicated to improving the health, independence and quality of life of older people through initiatives in clinical practice, professional and public education, research, and public policy advocacy.

With the population of Americans 65 and older expected to nearly double, to more than 70 million by 2030, providing high quality, cost-effective healthcare to older adults is imperative. The nation must take steps, now, to address the growing shortage of healthcare professionals trained to meet the unique healthcare needs of older adults, and to restructure the healthcare system in ways that further promote more appropriate care for older Americans. These steps will result in considerable savings by preventing costly complications, Emergency Room visits, and hospitalizations.

For more information, contact Alanna Goldstein, Manager of Public Affairs, at 212-304-1414 or agoldstein@americangeriatrics.org.