

NASL Health Care Reform Grassroots Advocacy Project

Overview

Congress is in the midst of its August recess, and legislators are feeling the heat of constituent uncertainty and angst about health care reform. For years, town hall meetings have been a staple of the August recess, as legislators spend extended time back in their districts meeting with constituents. However, as you have probably seen in recent press accounts, the generally civil tone of town hall meetings has taken an uncivil turn, as angry crowds protesting the pending health care reform legislation have confronted legislators in meetings across the country.

In a normal year, we would encourage NASL members to attend town hall meetings to raise issues important to members and our patients. However, it appears likely that the confrontational mode will continue through the rest of the month, which would make it difficult to discuss the issues in a constructive manner. Fortunately, there are other ways available to contact legislators on the pressing issues confronting long-term care providers.

With Congress pausing before it enters what promises to be a frenetic stretch run on health care reform this fall, we are seeking your help in carrying our long-term care message to your legislators.

Congressional Status

The three House committees with jurisdiction over health care reform legislation have passed their versions of the bill. When the House reconvenes next month, the House Rules Committee will work to consolidate the different measures into a single bill that will be brought before the House of Representatives.

The House legislation addresses key concerns in two areas for NASL members – the legislation would extend the therapy cap exceptions process for two years and it would address structural problems in the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula that continues to propose massive cuts in the physician fee schedule. However, the House legislation would hammer SNFs with new, punitive regulatory requirements and cuts totaling \$32 billion.

While the Senate HELP Committee has approved its own health reform bill, the Senate Finance Committee has jurisdiction over Medicare and Medicaid and has not yet released details about its emerging health care bill. Reports suggest that the panel will address the therapy cap and SGR issues (although we expect the Senate to adopt a temporary SGR fix as opposed to a complete overhaul of the formula). Several members of the committee are strong therapy supporters. It also appears that the Finance Committee bill will treat SNFs in a more equitable manner.

Grassroots Action Needed

Since we appear to be in a good shape on the therapy cap and SGR issues, we are encouraging NASL members to engage their legislators during the remaining four weeks of the congressional recess and urge them to oppose the cuts proposed by the House legislation.

We urge you to take two actions:

1. Urge your employees to visit the [NASL Advocacy Center](#) to write their legislators in opposition to the cuts in SNF funding proposed in the House bill.
2. Look for opportunities to meet with your legislators face-to-face to discuss our concerns about the proposed SNF cuts. You could call the legislator's district office to request a meeting, or seek other opportunities such as a civic club meeting, or other social and political engagements.

Send Legislators a Message Through NASL Advocacy Center

Please direct your employees to the [NASL Advocacy Center](#) to urge their legislators to oppose the SNF cuts. The NASL Advocacy Center is open for business and is primed to facilitate grassroots action by NASL members and their employees. This Web-based grassroots communications tool is located at www.capwiz.com/nasl. The site is easy to use and requires a minimum amount of effort.

Arrange Hometown Meetings With Legislators

Most legislators spend a considerable amount of time in their districts during the August recess. Although they will spend much of their time at public events, they will also be available for private meetings with constituents. It is easy to request a meeting, and while many might be booked for the rest of the month, you could be surprised by their availability. Begin with a phone call to the legislator's office, but be prepared to send a short letter requesting a meeting (many offices require meeting requests to be in writing).

You can find locations and telephone numbers for legislators at the [NASL Advocacy Center](#):

- Click the Elected Officials tab
- Enter your zip code
- Click information link below photo display
- Click contact tab

Message for Legislators

The message for legislators is straight forward:

- As a health care provider, you support reforming America's health care system to expand coverage, improve quality and manage costs
- Appreciate commitment to address therapy cap and physician fee schedule problems – these are essential components in patient access to quality care
- Recognize shared sacrifice is needed for common good
- House bill goes too far in imposing regulatory sanctions and payment cuts
 - Proposed cuts of \$32 billion for SNFs
 - House cut would be on top of \$12 billion cut made by CMS in the SNF PPS

- Cuts in House bill would compromise quality care for nation's most frail and vulnerable citizens
 - 70 percent of SNF operating costs are labor related
 - 50,000 jobs would be lost in long-term care sector
 - Job cuts would impede quality care
- Cuts would be unsustainable
 - Growing senior population in U.S.
 - People aged 65 and older in 2006 – 37.2 million
 - People aged 65 and older in 2030 – 72 million
 - Medicare enrollment in 2007 – 44 million
 - Projected Medicare enrollment in 2016 – 55 million
- A more equitable way to fund health care reform has to be found – it is unfair to place such a large burden on Medicare and Medicaid recipients

AHCA Grassroots

AHCA has launched an aggressive grassroots program called [Save Our Seniors](#) (SOS). The SOS website includes additional information about the proposed SNF cuts, including financial effects broken down by state and congressional districts. The SOS campaign includes a call for facilities to schedule congressional visits. Your employees might be able to play a positive role during these congressional visits.