



Fact Sheet

Long Term Services and Supports & Health Care Reform

Background

There is broad consensus that America's health care system needs reform. Over 46 million Americans are uninsured and more join their ranks every day as unemployment rises. A March 2009 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report which summarized several studies found that U.S. health care spending doubled from 1996 to 2006, reaching \$2.2 trillion in 2007, nearly double the average of other developed countries. All stakeholders agree that reform must provide affordable coverage, improve quality and lower costs. To achieve these goals, emphasis has been given to prevention to transform our health care system's focus from sickness to wellness, care coordination, chronic disease management, and shifting payment rates to focus on performance rather than services provided. Many Members of Congress have focused on the need to address the national shortage of physicians, nurses, and dentists which is especially severe in rural areas.




In addition to improving access to quality medical care for persons with developmental disabilities, health reform legislation must improve the way our nation provides long term services and supports (such as assistance and supervision with activities of daily living, taking medication, managing a home, and preparing meals, managing money). Removing Medicaid's institutional bias so that persons with disabilities can receive services in community-based settings that are preferred and more cost-effective rather than in large congregate settings is critical. Huge waiting lists for long term services and supports across the country constitute a major crisis.

Advocates in the disability and aging communities have urged the inclusion of long term services and supports in health care reform. There should be a national long term services insurance program which assists eligible individuals and their families to meet long term needs with a cash benefit and without forcing them into poverty to receive Medicaid benefits and allow them to receive services in the setting of their choice. Such a program would reduce the burden on the Medicaid program, thereby helping to increase the availability of Medicaid-funded home and community based services and reducing waiting lists. The Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act would accomplish these objectives.



Recommendations

Support health reform legislation that:

-  Ensures that the private insurance system covers ALL Americans so that Medicaid and Medicare are not the only option for coverage of people with disabilities;
-  Incorporates long term services and supports by including the CLASS Act; and
-  Strengthens the Medicaid program so that it provides accessible, high-quality, health care services to people with disabilities enrolled in the program.

Relevant Committees

Senate Finance Committee

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee

House Energy and Commerce Committee

House Ways and Means Committee

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