

Nation's Long Term Care Leaders Urge Congress To Extend FMAP

Immediate Extension of Critical Medicaid Funds Crucial To Nation's Elderly

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Washington, DC – Over four hundred members of the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) descended upon Capitol Hill today to lobby lawmakers on federal long term care issues as part of its annual congressional briefing, specifically urging Congress to pass a pending six month extension to the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP).

"The temporary FMAP increase is vital to preserving seniors' ongoing access to the skilled nursing and rehabilitative care they require," stated Bruce Yarwood, President and CEO of AHCA/NCAL. "Considering the squeeze on seniors' care and facility operations caused by federal Medicare cuts of nearly \$27 billion over ten years – put in place in just the past seven months – FMAP serves as the critical safety net protecting seniors and the jobs of the front line caregivers who make a qualitative difference in patient outcomes."

The National Association of State Budget Officers recently reported that states face a collective \$55.4 billion shortfall in FY 2011, and a combined \$136.1 billion in deficits over FYs 2010-2012. Twenty-four states have already budgeted assuming extension of the enhanced FMAP.

"During our prolonged recession, there's been an important federal provision that boosted state Medi-Cal assistance which resulted in access to quality care and services for California's oldest, most vulnerable seniors," stated James Gomez, President and CEO of the California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF). "Unfortunately, Congress failed to pass an extension of this provision to protect our eldercare safety net. At stake is nearly \$2 billion in funds and now more than ever, we need our Congressional lawmakers to help get this done."

"Throughout the year, THCA member facilities will continue to highlight the fact that meeting seniors' ongoing care needs – as well as sustaining a strong workforce and local jobs base – will be contingent upon sustaining appropriate Medicaid funding levels in the face of deep cuts to Medicare in Washington," stated Tim Graves, President and CEO of the Texas Health Care Association (THCA). "With more than sixty percent of our facility costs directly related to staffing, it has not taken long for the cumulative funding squeeze to hurt."

Passed originally as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), a six-month extension is urgently required, the long term care leaders warned, because Medicaid resources seniors require to maintain access to quality care are being cut, and key frontline care jobs that make a vital difference in patient outcomes are in jeopardy. They also noted December 31, 2010 falls in the middle of most states' fiscal years – thus complicating critical budgetary planning to meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

"The eldercare financing crisis at hand cannot be papered-over or pushed to the policy back burner, and Congress must act now," Yarwood concluded. "Adequate, stable and consistent Medicare and Medicaid funding was and always will be directly linked with high quality care and staffing and employment stability."

As the nation's largest association of long term and post-acute care providers, the American Health Care Association (AHCA) advocates for quality care and services for frail, elderly and disabled Americans. Compassionate and caring employees provide essential care to one million individuals in our 11,000 not-for-profit and proprietary member facilities.