

# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION HEALTH CARE REFORM ACTIVITIES UPDATE



With congressional action on health care reform in full swing, this update will focus on APA's recent efforts to ensure that the interests and contributions of psychology are fully addressed in the final bill moving forward. Since my [last update](#), the national spotlight has focused on the Senate Finance Committee and its Chairman, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT). APA continues to be actively engaged with key negotiators in the Senate, House of Representatives, and White House to promote [our health care reform priorities](#).

## **Responding to the Senate Finance Committee Proposal**

The APA and APA Practice Organization (APAPO) government relations staff carefully reviewed the 220-page Senate Finance Committee's *America's Healthy Future Act of 2009*, which was released on September 16. We were pleased to see the close alignment between specific bill provisions and APA's priorities for health care reform that fall within the committee's jurisdiction. These key provisions include support for integrated health care models to promote an interdisciplinary team-based approach to service delivery, the inclusion of mental health and substance use services in the essential benefit package, and data collection and quality measures to address health disparities. Also included of paramount importance to APAPO are a 2-year extension of the 5% psychotherapy payment restoration passed in 2008 as part of the *Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act* and a replacement of a pending 21% cut in reimbursement for independent professional services under Medicare Part B with a 0.5% increase. APA took the lead role in drafting a [Mental Health Liaison Group letter of support](#) to Chairman Baucus, which focused on the bill's many favorable provisions and was cosigned by 38 national organizations.

No fewer than 564 amendments to the bill were proposed by Finance Committee members, of which about 150 were considered by the committee. The handful of committee-approved amendments of most significance to APA provide for: the integration of behavioral health and primary care; inclusion of behavioral health treatment in mental health and substance abuse services; coordination of mental health and substance abuse treatment; support, education, and research for postpartum depression; and clarification that the federal mental health and addiction parity law applies to the state exchanges. The [Finance Committee bill, as amended](#), was approved by the committee on October 13.

## **Moving Forward to the Full Senate**

The challenging task now before Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) is to merge the bill approved by the Finance Committee with the [bill approved by the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions \(HELP\) Committee and its amendments](#). I just sent Majority Leader Reid a [letter on behalf of APA](#), highlighting important provisions in both the Finance and HELP bills to be included in the merged bill. To reinforce our

message, our government relations staff has also been meeting with key Senate offices, bolstered by targeted constituent contacts from APA members. Floor action on health care reform legislation in both the House and Senate is expected within the next few weeks.

### **Reaching out to the White House**

On September 24, APA Senior Policy Advisor Ellen Garrison, PhD, and I met with a senior staff member at the White House Office of Health Reform who is on detail from the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Health Reform. Given this staff member's appreciation of health and behavior issues, he readily supported our health care reform priorities. We were thus successful in achieving our goal of initiating a relationship with both of these critical executive branch offices related to health care reform. We are hopeful that this relationship will facilitate the inclusion of our priorities in the final health care reform legislation, since the director of the White House Office of Health Reform, Nancy-Ann DeParle, is representing the White House in the ongoing Senate negotiations (along with Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel and Office of Management and Budget Director Peter Orszag). To amplify our message, I sent her a letter similar to the one I sent to Majority Leader Reid.

This meeting followed up on an earlier White House Stakeholders Discussion Group meeting with Nancy-Ann DeParle to which APA was invited to send one senior staff member and two practicing psychologists and was the only non-medical specialty group in attendance. We were effectively represented at this webcast event by: Katherine Nordal, PhD, APA's executive director for professional practice; Jean Carter, PhD, a Washington, DC, psychologist and APA Board of Directors member; and Mary Alvord, PhD, a practicing psychologist in Maryland. They made a strong case for the integration of psychological services into primary care, which was the focus of the discussion group, and emphasized the critical role of psychologists as health care providers. A [Mental Health Weekly article](#) featured quotes from Katherine Nordal (and Ellen Garrison) related to APA's participation in the White House Stakeholders meeting and our priorities for health care reform.

As APA and APAPO continue to promote our health care reform priorities to Congress and the executive branch, [I welcome any thoughts, suggestions, and ideas](#) that you would like to offer. While I may not be able to provide a personal response to your message (given the number of comments that I might receive), I certainly look forward to hearing from you. I also encourage you to visit our [APA health care reform website](#) for resource material on our health care reform priorities and news of our related activities.

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