

# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION HEALTH CARE REFORM ACTIVITIES UPDATE



APA continues to advocate strongly for psychology's vital interests and concerns related to health care reform proposals being considered by Congress, the White House, and other key federal agencies. I encourage you to visit our new [APA Health Care Reform website](#) for information about psychology's role in health care reform, our priorities, our initiatives, and ways in which you can get involved. In this update, I would like to focus on our efforts to amplify our message through grassroots appeals to our membership and through involvement with coalitions composed of a wide range of organizations concerned about health care.

## **What's Happening on Health Care Reform?**

Since [my earlier updates](#) on APA's health care reform efforts, Congress adjourned for August recess after the House Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Labor Committees approved their versions of the original Tri-Committee health care reform bill. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee recently completed work on its bill, and the Senate Finance Committee has just released its legislative overview, which our government relations staff is reviewing carefully.

Over this past month, highly partisan debate and discontent with various health care reform proposals have surfaced in tumultuous town hall meetings and in response to [President Obama's recent presentation](#) to a joint session of Congress. Compounded by severe budgetary constraints, it is very possible that the broad health care reform initiatives proposed by the President, which reflect bills introduced in both the House and Senate, will be scaled back to focus on providing health insurance to the millions of people who are currently uninsured. Whatever the outcome, it is critical to note that **coverage for mental health and substance abuse disorders is included in the required benefit packages for all plans in the proposed health care exchange.** In addition, we have redoubled our efforts to enhance the role of psychology in what will hopefully become a transformed health care system that is more integrated, accessible, affordable, and equitable.

## **Amplifying Psychology's Voice Through Coalitions**

Working with coalitions has extended the reach of APA and the APA Practice Organization (APAPO) government relations staff by garnering support from other prominent organizations for some of [APA's health care reform priorities](#), most notably, those related to integrated care, workforce, and health disparities. Some of these coalition efforts are highlighted below.

**Promoting Integrated Care.** APA and APAPO have made many influential contacts through their participation with prominent new coalitions of health and other organizations focused on integrated

care. These include [Divided We Fail](#) and a coalition led by [Families USA](#). APA and APAPO have engaged with these groups to further our advocacy for integrated care, which includes psychologists and psychological services in primary care. On a related front, APAPO crafted a legislative amendment to help achieve this goal and successfully enlisted the support of provider groups and coalitions of mental health organizations.

**Advocating Interdisciplinary Workforce Development.** APA's Public Interest and Education Government Relations offices are actively involved with the [Eldercare Workforce Alliance \(EWA\)](#). This coalition of 29 national organizations is advocating for a strong eldercare workforce to meet the needs of our aging population as an essential component of health care reform. APA helped coordinate national advocacy days on September 15 and previously on June 23 to bring this critical message to Capitol Hill. Most recently, over 50 participants from across the country, including a number of APA members, who represented interdisciplinary health professionals, direct-care workers, and family caregivers, took part in an advocacy training at APA followed by meetings with key congressional leaders. On Capitol Hill, the participants promoted EWA priorities for health care reform, including the expansion of vital federal health professions education and training programs to include psychologists and initiatives to promote effective integrated, interdisciplinary models of care. In addition, EWA once again purchased a full-page advertisement in *Roll Call*, a popular Capitol Hill newspaper, to draw attention to these health care reform priorities.

**Eliminating Health Disparities.** APA's Public Interest Government Relations Office (PI-GRO) continues to lead the [National Working Group on Health Disparities and Health Reform](#), which is composed of over 200 national organizations and coalitions dedicated to advocating for attention to health disparities in health care reform. Most recently, the working group drafted letters to the White House and key members of Congress requesting continued support for critical legislative provisions for data collection to identify and respond to health disparities. On behalf of the group, PI-GRO staff submitted a Letter to the Editor of *The New York Times* in response to reports that threatened removal of data collection provisions from pending legislation to reduce costs. APA's PI-GRO is likewise taking the lead in coordinating a September 22 Senate briefing on health disparities for which I will provide an overview of health disparities as the lead presenter and will be joined on the panel by representatives from the White House and The Carter Center, among others.

### **The Power of Grassroots Advocacy**

In response to an APAPO Action Alert, psychologists from across the country made their voices heard in August by reaching out to their Senators and Representatives through in-district visits, town hall meetings, and calls to their contacts in congressional offices. Our members sent more than 4,700 messages to Capitol Hill urging passage of comprehensive health care reform legislation that fully integrates psychologists and psychological services into the health care delivery system and that includes an extension of the 5% payment restoration to mental health services previously cut as a result of the "5-year-review" regulation of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

As APA continues to vigorously pursue our health care reform initiatives, [I welcome any thoughts, suggestions, and ideas](#) that you, our members, 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 reviewing each and every one.

Thank you!

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