

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION HEALTH CARE REFORM ACTIVITIES UPDATE



This is the first in a series of occasional e-mail messages to keep you informed about our association's ongoing efforts to promote the role and contributions of psychology in health care reform. The American Psychological Association's (APA) [eight key health care reform priorities](#) have been provided to all members of Congress, the new White House Office of Health Reform, and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

An April *Monitor* article outlined the broad APA priorities for our research-based [vision for health care reform](#). In my May column, I described some of the [specific strategies and related actions](#) we are taking to achieve our goals in this arena. Our association-wide plan includes advocacy on Capitol Hill and outreach to the Executive Branch, alliance building with other organizations, media communications, and outreach to inform and encourage the involvement of our members.

Highlights of Our Recent Accomplishments

Meeting With Offices on Capitol Hill

APA and APA Practice Organization (APAPO) government relations staffs have been conducting numerous "Hill visits" to advance APA's health care reform priorities. These meetings with congressional offices have focused primarily on the importance of integrated care, prevention, and health promotion; the inclusion of mental health benefits at parity across the life span; psychology workforce development; the elimination of health disparities; and increased federal funding for health-related behavioral and psychosocial research. APAPO staff has also been advocating for enhanced Medicare recognition and reimbursement for psychologists.

Working With Congressional Committees

- The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee invited the legislative counsel for APAPO to participate in a special working group on health care reform. This staff member is the sole voice for the mental health and substance abuse communities on the working group and the only participant who represents a non-physician provider group.
- APAPO submitted a detailed response to the first health care reform options paper released by the Senate Finance Committee—the other key Senate committee working on health care reform. The [APAPO letter](#) focuses on promoting Medicare payment reform, increasing access to psychologists' services, and enhancing psychology training opportunities.
- APA's Public Interest Government Relations Office (GRO) took the lead in developing [our response](#) to the second Senate Finance Committee policy paper. Our letter emphasizes the importance of an integrated, interdisciplinary health care system across

the life span that extends from prevention to recovery and includes a focus on eliminating health disparities.

Advocating for Psychology Workforce Legislation

- APA's Education GRO is advocating for the inclusion of psychology in national workforce policy development, with a special focus on interdisciplinary training. A major priority is to enhance federal support for the APA-initiated [Graduate Psychology Education \(GPE\) Program](#), which is the nation's only federal program solely dedicated to psychology education and training. This year, Education GRO staff successfully lobbied for the introduction of both House and Senate bills to provide ongoing statutory authority for this program.

Promoting Psychological Research

APA's Science GRO and Executive Office, with assistance from our Division of Health Psychology, prepared [testimony for the Institute of Medicine](#) on comparative effectiveness research and are reaching out to the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality to ensure that behavioral and psychosocial research is included in the new \$1.1 billion Department of Health and Human Services initiative funded through the stimulus package.

Partnering With Coalitions

- APA and APAPO are representing psychology's interests on numerous stakeholder coalitions composed of health and/or mental health organizations, as well as consumer groups, business, labor, and the insurance industry. Our various partners include NAMI, AARP, the Service Employees International Union, and the National Federation of Independent Business. The importance of working in such coalitions cannot be overstated. This facilitates the process of gaining wide consensus on health care reform policies that we all share, thus expanding the number of groups that are providing policymakers with the same message (e.g., regarding the importance of integrated care, prevention, and mental health services).
- APA's Public Interest GRO convened and is leading a large group of organizations and coalitions to advocate for attention to health disparities in health care reform initiatives. Participants represent ethnic minority; faith; disability; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, among others. A Public Interest GRO staff member was invited to represent this group at two health care reform-related meetings at the White House and stressed the importance of addressing health disparities.

Sharing Information With the Public

We are also intent on getting the word out to the public about the importance of behavioral factors in the prevention and treatment of chronic disease and the critical role that psychologists play on the health care team in primary care and other health care settings. I recently discussed these issues on *Oprah Radio* during an interview conducted by Dr. Mehmet Oz, a Columbia University surgeon who serves as the on-air medical consultant to the *Oprah Show*. The interview will be posted in the coming weeks at <http://www.oprah.com/oradio>. We are also preparing opinion pieces and special Web pages to convey our message to the public.

The Changing Legislative Picture on Health Care Reform

Given the high priority placed by President Obama and members of Congress on health care reform, it should come as no surprise that the legislative picture is changing moment to moment. In fact, Senate HELP Committee

Chairman Ted Kennedy recently released a 615-page draft health care reform bill, which represents a major step forward for our nation. We applaud this effort and are in the process of carefully reviewing the draft bill's provisions. It is worth noting that only one health care reform bill is ultimately expected to emerge from the House and only one from the Senate, which may be voted on in each chamber later this summer.

Until that time, negotiation on Capitol Hill and with the White House is likely to be intense. Rest assured that our government relations staff is primed and ready to continue to advocate for the issues of concern to psychology.

We hope that you will seize opportunities to work with us to further communicate APA's health care reform message to Congress. As a voting constituent, your strong voice will help to amplify ours!

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