

## February Policy Update

March 11, 2010

### Health Care Reform

Health care reform stalled for most of February after the U.S. Senate lost their super majority vote after the Massachusetts special election. However, by the end of the month there was renewed commitment in the Senate, House and Administration to pass a health care reform bill by the spring recess.

### **President Obama's Health Care Summit**

President Obama held his bi-partisan health care reform summit on February 25<sup>th</sup>. After 7 hours of discussion, it's hard to say exactly what was achieved. The analysis in Washington is that, at the very least, the conclusion of the Summit allows the democrats to push on with health care reform since they have offered a very public opportunity for compromise. Democratic staffers reported that they feel as though a compromise package is near completion.

President Obama is expected to make an announcement in early March on both timing and policy issues related to moving the health reform legislation forward. In addition, a letter is circulating that President Obama reportedly sent to House and Senate leadership summarizing areas of agreement and disagreement, and most importantly, stating:

*"Both parties agree that the health care status quo is unsustainable. And both should agree that it's just not an option to walk away from the millions of American families and business owners counting on reform. After decades of trying, we're closer than we've ever been to making health insurance reform a reality. I look forward to working with you to complete what would be a truly historic achievement."*

For more information you can visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/live>. Details on the various plans are posted at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/health-care-meeting>.

### **Next Steps**

The basic goal remains for the House to pass the Senate bill and then for both chambers to pass a reconciliation bill to remedy differences between the two chambers. The reconciliation process is connected to the budget process and therefore has a timeline for completion this spring. The reconciliation bill will reportedly be the first 9-10 items in President Obama's bill.

There are many procedural hurdles involved in completing these legislative steps but all of the major pieces of health care legislation that have become law in the last 30 years (COBRA, CHIP, etc.) have been enacted through reconciliation. The general tone in Washington by the end of February was very positive that a health care reform bill will pass.

### **What this means for SBHCs**

The Senate bill includes two SBHC provisions which remain in-tact: **1) a federal authorization and 2) emergency appropriations for SBHCs**. Once a Senate bill is passed by the House and signed by President Obama, the SBHC provisions will become law.

### **NASBHC Strategy**

NASBHC staff and supporters are working hard on behalf of SBHCs. We are putting pressure on target House members to support the passage of the Senate bill. We will continue to monitor the process and mobilize members and supporters as Congress advances health care reform in March.

We are also exploring opportunities to pass the provisions that were included in the House bill, which are not in the Senate bill: 1) language requiring regulations regarding reimbursement under Medicaid and CHIP for SBHCs and 2) the establishment of technical assistance for SBHCs.

NASBHC continues to work with both House and Senate staff on the issue of reimbursement and conversations are being had between Congressional staff and CMS to determine how to move this issue forward and if a regulatory fix is something that can be accomplished. There are also other bills that may prove to be vehicles to move the reimbursement provisions.

NASBHC will continue to monitor bills for opportunities to include the technical assistance for SBHCs. Another strategy is to include this provision in regulations for the federal authorization.

## **Education Reform**

Congressional leadership began conversations on the Elementary Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind (ESEA/NCLB) re-authorization. Leadership continues to assess the political landscape and the possibility of drafting a bi-partisan bill in the coming months. This process may prove to be more challenging than health care reform resulting in Congress to delay re-authorization until after elections. NASBHC continues to monitor the status of re-authorization and other education bills while partnering with national education organizations on strategies to promote SBHCs in education policies. The expansion of Title I funds to ensure that SBHCs have the opportunity to use the funding to deliver supportive services and expanding the community school model and a role for SBHCs are two policy opportunities on NASBHCs education agenda.