Senate Moving on Health Care Reform
Details are Scarce, but Advocacy Necessary

June 14, 2017

For several weeks, a group of 13 Republican Senators have met regularly to hash out the Senate’s proposal to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA) following narrow House passage last month of the American Health Care Act (AHCA). Unfortunately, because negotiations are happening behind closed doors, other lawmakers and stakeholders have not seen details of the Senate’s proposal.

We understand that members of this health care task force are sending their proposal to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) piece-by-piece without disclosing those legislative components publicly. Because the CBO is required to weigh in on legislation before it comes to the full chamber for a vote, it is conceivable that leadership may bring a health care reform bill to the floor that their Senate colleagues and health care stakeholders haven’t seen.

While the specifics and timing of a potential vote on this bill are still unknown, what is clear is that the Senate is likely to follow the House in proposing an ACA repeal and replace package that has significant implications for older adults and also drastically restructures and cuts the federal Medicaid program. We also know that once a bill is brought to the floor, it will likely move very quickly to approval, and there will be very little opportunity to make changes and improvements to the proposal. Should an ACA repeal and Medicaid reform bill pass the Senate, we fully expect that it would quickly pass the House and be signed into law.

The time to act is now, and advocacy on this important issue cannot wait until details of the Senate bill are disclosed! Area Agencies on Aging and other aging advocates must continue to reach out to lawmakers about the importance of protecting Medicaid, especially for older adults. To assist local advocacy efforts, n4a will be releasing updated tools and resources next week that AAAs and other aging advocates can use to engage their lawmakers.

We also encourage AAAs—and your organization/advisory board leadership—to join us for a conference call on Tuesday, June 20 at 11:30 a.m. ET to discuss our advocacy strategy in the Senate. Register for the call now! The call-in number is: 1-877-309-2074 and the access code is: 749-628-482
Recap on ACA Repeal & Replace Proposals

As n4a’s May 25th Legislative Update detailed, the CBO estimated that the American Health Care Act (AHCA), which passed the House in early May, would cause 23 million people, including 14 million (17 percent) Medicaid beneficiaries, to lose health insurance coverage over the next 10 years. According to the CBO score, the bill would also significantly increase costs and reduce coverage options for poorer, sicker and older Americans.

Furthermore, CBO estimated that the current version of AHCA would cut $834 billion—or nearly 25 percent—from Medicaid over ten years. Because AHCA restructures Medicaid from the current federal-state partnership, wherein the federal government guarantees to match state spending on the program regardless of cost or enrollment, to a per-capita cap or block grant structure that limits federal contributions, reduced federal outlays would shift significant costs and risks to states.

n4a remains opposed to the American Health Care Act, as it does not adequately address the ACA issues we raised in our January ACA Policy Brief and goes beyond ACA-related provisions to fundamentally undermine federal support for Medicaid, weakening this key health and long-term care safety net for older adults.

There is still much legislative work to be done before any health care reforms are finalized. Stay tuned for more information and resources from n4a and join us for a conference call on Tuesday, June 20 at 11:30 a.m. ET to explore these important issues and necessary advocacy!

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This Legislative Update is an n4a membership benefit. For more information about these and other federal aging policy issues, please contact n4a’s policy team: Amy Gotwals (agotwals@n4a.org) and Autumn Campbell (acampbell@n4a.org), 202.872.0888.