



At 7am on December 24th, the Senate passed H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The passage of the legislation marks another hurdle in the effort to pass sweeping health reform legislation in Congress. The House passed its health reform bill in November and now Senate and House leadership will reconcile the differences between the two pieces of legislation, setting the stage for final passage of a health reform bill.

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is committed to keeping the dental hygiene community informed on health reform matters that impact the profession. Both the House and Senate bills contain significant oral health provisions that are not often mentioned in media coverage of health reform.

ADHA respects that there are many opinions on health reform within the dental hygiene community. This update is not intended to sway recipients in one direction or the other on the issue, but is offered as a means to update dental hygiene professionals about the oral health provisions contained in the Senate bill (H.R. 3590) and the House bill (H.R. 3962).

The legislation passed by the Senate on the 24th touches on many facets of the oral health care delivery system—benefits, workforce, infrastructure, and oral health literacy. **The attached chart offers an overview of the oral health provisions in both the House and Senate bills, highlights the differences between the two bills, and offers insight into impact of the provisions on dental hygiene.**

The following is a brief overview of oral health provisions contained in the Senate health reform bill passed on December 24th:

- **Pediatric Dental Benefit:** The bill requires a dental benefit be included as part of the essential health benefits package for all eligible children (through age 21) who receive coverage through the newly-created health insurance exchange. The bill does not include an adult dental benefit.
- **Contracting with Stand-alone Dental Plans:** The bill would allow stand-alone dental plans to operate as part of health insurance exchanges to meet pediatric dental benefit requirements. The provision accommodates the way the current system is structured in that most medical plans do not include dental benefits and most dental insurance plans are offered separate from medical plans.
- **Alternative Dental Health Care Provider Demonstration Project Grants:** The bill would allocate up to \$60 million for the education and demonstration of alternative dental

health care providers, including dental hygiene and advanced practice dental hygiene workforce models.

- **Oral Health Workforce Provisions:** The bill includes a section that would establish programs and allocate federal monies to expand and develop the dental workforce. The provisions include dental hygienists, dental hygiene students, and dental hygiene education programs as eligible entities for funds.
- **Medicaid Reimbursement/Eligibility Levels** – The bill would extend Medicaid eligibility to all individuals at 133% of the federal poverty level (FPL).
- **Oral Health Programs in School-based Clinics:** The bill would establish a grant program for school-based health clinics, including those that offer oral health services.
- **Oral Health Infrastructure and Surveillance:** The bill would establish a number of oral health education and surveillance programs to improve the public's understanding of the importance of oral health and collect data on access to oral health services.

H.R. 3590 was passed in the Senate by a vote of 60-39. Over the next 3-4 weeks, Senate and House leadership will begin the process of reconciling the differences between the House and Senate health reform bills. Once a compromise bill is negotiated, both the House and Senate will vote on it prior to it being sent to the President for signature into law.

ADHA is recognized as a valued stakeholder in oral health and has been approached by policymakers and their staff for input on health reform. ADHA will continue to be engaged in the effort as the reconciliation process unfolds. ***Not being a part of the dialogue on health reform is simply not an option for any stakeholder, including ADHA.*** As the national association that Empowers, Develops, and Supports dental hygiene professionals, ADHA has a responsibility to serve as the voice of the profession on policy matters. *The association has not endorsed a specific health reform plan or legislative vehicle.* ADHA's efforts relative to health reform are guided by the association's Statement on Health Reform: http://www.adha.org/downloads/ADHA_Health_Reform_Statement.pdf.

The Statement highlights the importance of oral health as an integral component of total health. As an oral health professional, you know that an individual cannot have a healthy body without a healthy mouth. As such, ADHA asserts that if/when comprehensive health reform proposals are considered by Congress, oral health should be included.

Please know that ADHA staff is available to answer questions and offer additional information. Contact us via e-mail by replying directly to this message. ADHA Offices will be closed until Monday, January 4, 2010 in observance of the holidays, but staff will be checking e-mail during the time between now and January 4th. ADHA will continue to offer updates as efforts related to health reform progress.

Sincerely,

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