

Government Affairs Report March 2015

Below is a summary of AACN's progress on advocacy initiatives since the Fall Meeting in October 2014. Activities are delineated as outlined in AACN's 2015 Federal Policy Agenda (FPA).

I. Amplify nursing leadership to transform America's healthcare delivery system into one that is patient-centered and team-based.

Accountable Care Organizations

AACN, along with its colleagues representing Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), submitted comments on February 6, 2015, to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding a proposed rule for the [Accountable Care Organizations \(ACO\) Medicare Shared Savings Program](#). This program was established to "facilitate coordination and cooperation among providers to improve the quality of care for Medicare Fee-For-Services beneficiaries and reduce unnecessary costs. Eligible providers, hospitals, and suppliers may participate in the Shared Savings Program by creating or participating in an ACO. The Shared Savings Program will reward ACOs that lower their growth in healthcare costs while meeting performance standards on quality of care and putting patients first."

Existing statute requires that a medical director who is also a physician oversees clinical management of an ACO. The APRN community responded to CMS citing that APRNs are highly-qualified to serve in this capacity and urged CMS to remove this requirement. Removal of this unnecessary and burdensome oversight will help ensure patients have access to the health providers they need while upholding recommendations set forth by the Institute of Medicine to utilize APRNs as equal partners in transformative healthcare delivery models.

21st Century Cures Initiative

On February 13, 2015, AACN commented on a [discussion document](#) outlining priorities in draft legislation for the [21st Century Cures Act](#). This initiative aims to accelerate the discovery and dissemination of healthcare cures. House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) and Ranking Member Diana DeGette (D-CO) emphasized the need for Congress to support healthcare research through "a comprehensive look at what steps we can take to accelerate the pace of cures in America. We are looking at the full arc of this process – from the discovery of clues in basic science, to streamlining the drug and device development process, to unleashing the power of digital medicine and social media at the treatment delivery phase."

In its [comments](#) to the committee, AACN applauded the goals of the legislation to "aid in the discovery, development, and delivery of the next generation of patient-centered solutions here in the United States." AACN is committed to advancing nursing and healthcare science, which include the foundation for evidence-based practice. To do so, it is essential that research infrastructure can support future generations of nursing and healthcare scientists. According to AACN data, there were 5,145 nursing students enrolled in research-focused doctoral programs last year. The 21st Century Cures Act would support young emerging scientists in the field.

ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION IN NURSING

Additionally, AACN urged the Committee to consider including provider-neutral language throughout the legislation in order to ensure the full breadth of providers is captured so that their expertise and services can be offered to the public. AACN will continue to weigh-in and collaborate with its partners as the 21st Century Cures Act advances through the legislative process.

AACN-Supported Legislation in the 114th Congress

[Home Health Planning and Improvement Act \(S.578, H.R. 1342\)](#)

This legislation authorizes nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives and physician assistants as eligible healthcare professionals who can certify patient eligibility for home health care services under Medicare.

[Improving Veterans Access to Quality Healthcare Act of 2015 \(H.R. 1247\)](#)

This legislation recognizes APRNs within the Veterans Health Administration as full practice providers, consistent with the Department of Defense.

[Improving Access to Maternity Care Act of 2015 \(H.R. 1209, S. 628\)](#)

This legislation aims to expand access to maternity care for our country's most vulnerable populations by creating the designation of a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for maternity care services.

[Protecting Access to Rural Therapy Service \(S. 257\)](#)

This legislation expands its definition of "non-physician practitioner" to include APRNs (nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse-midwives, and clinical nurse specialists) as clinicians eligible to provide these services under general supervision, rather than direct supervision, of a physician or certain non-physician practitioner.

- II. Advance policies that allow academic institutions to meet the need for a more highly-educated and diverse nursing workforce, focusing on seamless academic progression, affordability, and interprofessional education.**

AACN Supported Legislation in the 114th Congress

[Indian Health Service Health Professions Tax Fairness Act \(S. 536\)](#)

This legislation would amend the tax code to provide healthcare professionals who receive student loan repayments from the Indian Health Service the same tax-free status enjoyed by those who receive National Health Service Corps loan repayments.

[Supporting Academic Freedom through Regulatory Relief Act \(H.R. 970\)](#)

This legislation addresses ineffective and costly regulations and related actions promulgated or proposed by the Department of Education on distance education, college rating system, and gainful employment.

- III. Secure federal investments that strengthen the academic nursing infrastructure.**
&
IV. Secure federal investments in research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation, discovery, and application.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Appropriations

On February 2, 2015, the President released his [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2016 Budget](#). The budget includes a recommended level of \$231.6 million (level funding with FY 2015) for the Nursing Workforce

Development programs (Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act) and \$144.5 million (2.53% increase over FY 2015) for the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In addition to other [federal programs of interest](#), the Administration proposes to expand the beneficiary assignment in the Accountable Care Organizations to a “broader set of primary care providers,” such as nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists. The Department of Health and Human Services Budget in Brief states that this proposal, “could result in a greater number of Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries being assigned to ACOs that rely on non-physician practitioners for a majority of primary care services, such as those in rural or underserved areas” and “suggests a savings of \$60 million in 10 years.”

In FY 2016, the Nursing Community, a coalition of 61 national nursing organizations operated by AACN, is requesting \$244 million for the Nursing Workforce Development programs and \$150 million for the NINR. On February 24, 2015, the Nursing Community, in collaboration with the House Nursing Caucus, hosted a one-day event to discuss the impact nursing has on improving our nation’s health care. Talking points for the event included the above request levels. Representatives from 21 of the coalition’s members traveled to Washington, DC and over 65 Congressional staffers, representing 31 Congressional offices across 20 states from the House and the Senate as well as 6 members of Congress attended. AACN works with multiple coalitions to advance the appropriations levels for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the National Health Service Corps, all of Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

AACN Supported Legislation to Address Research Funding in the 114th Congress ***[American Cures Act \(S. 289\)](#)***

This legislation proposes a mandatory trust fund for the NIH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Defense health program, and the medical and prosthetics research program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

[Accelerating Biomedical Research Act \(S. 318\)](#)

This legislation creates budget cap adjustments to allow for maximum investment in NIH under the Budget Control Act (P.L. 112-25) and urges appropriators to sustain NIH’s budget adjusted for inflation throughout future fiscal years.

AACN’S STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS GOALS

I. Enhance AACN member awareness of pressing policy opportunities for engagement and notify AACN members of federal programmatic announcements.

The [University Government Relations Collaborative](#) (UGRC) strives to ensure that government relations representatives understand the most current advocacy efforts to help promote a clear, consistent, and unified message to federal and state legislators on national nursing issues. UGRC members receive bimonthly updates containing information on current activities for their institutions to get involved in AACN’s policy work, new policy-related resources, and news items. To recommend a member of your government affairs staff to join the UGRC please contact, Leeza Constantoulakis, Government Affairs Assistant, at lconstant@aacn.nche.edu.

AACN’s [Grassroots Network](#) continues to increase its membership. In October 2014, the Grassroots Network consisted of 11,803 nursing deans, faculty, students, and other stakeholders. Today, 12,066 members are subscribed. Encourage your students and faculty to sign-up and support AACN’s voice on Capitol Hill.

AACN's [State Grassroots Liaisons](#) (SGLs) serve as key stakeholders by amplifying AACN's advocacy voice and informing staff on state-level issues. SGLs convene quarterly on conference calls to discuss current policy and are valuable resources who help inform staff on issues impacting nursing schools.

[@AACNPolicy](#): Since its creation on May 13, 2014, GA staff have sent 103 tweets on pertinent policy issues and 140 stakeholders are following AACN's engagement. Top impression tweets (or hot topics) include AACN's post on the Cromnibus-FY 2015 appropriations (733 impressions), AACN's post congratulating Dr. Wilmoth on her promotion to Major General of the US Army Reserve's (686 impressions), and AACN's post when Marilyn Tavenner accepted the association's Policy Luminary Award (515 impressions).

II. Develop healthcare policy leaders from within the nursing profession to be a formidable voice in the state and federal policy arenas.

AACN's Sixth Annual Student Policy Summit

AACN's sixth annual [Student Policy Summit](#) will bring 195 undergraduate and graduate students to Washington, DC for a three-day conference centered on healthcare policy and advocacy.

New Initiative AACN's Grassroots Prize

On behalf of all of the contributors to the award-winning book *Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care* who so generously donate their time to advance nurses' knowledge of health policy and political action, the editors of the book and its publisher, Elsevier, are pleased to sponsor the new Grassroots Prize. The *AACN Student Grassroots Prize* will provide \$500 each to three exceptional students who created a project that engaged individuals (i.e. students, coworkers, or other colleagues in the community) toward a common local, state, or federal policy effort. Available only to attendees of the Student Policy Summit, applicants will have until the December following the Summit to submit an application essay or other form of media (e.g. video) detailing the grassroots project they have created.

AACN's Third Faculty Policy Intensive

Coinciding with the AACN's 2015 Spring Annual Meeting is AACN's third annual [Faculty Policy Intensive](#) (FPI). As part of the FPI program, participants will continue their engagement in AACN policy and advocacy initiatives and contribute to a growing pool of faculty experts. The selected faculty for 2015 are:

Jane Campbell, DNP, RN, NE-BC
Northern Michigan University

Mai Kung, DNP, MPH, ARNP-BC
Florida State University

Patsy Cornelius, PhD, RN
University of Arkansas Fort Smith

David LaFevers, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC
University of Missouri-Kansas City

Amanda Fallin, PhD, RN
University of Kentucky

Janice Miller, DNP, CRNP, CDE
Thomas Jefferson University

Eileen Fry-Bowers, PhD, JD, RN, CPNP
Loma Linda University

Suzanne Staebler, DNP, APRN, NNP-BC, FAANP
Emory University