

FROM THE HILL

Senate Confirms Sebelius as HHS Secretary

On April 28, late in the evening, the Senate voted 65-31 to confirm Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius as Health and Human Services secretary, filling the last remaining vacancy in President Obama's Cabinet.

Secretary Sebelius was sworn in amidst the 2009 swine flu public health crisis, which she pledged would be her first priority. The swine flu is the first public health crisis of the Obama Administration.

The only significant objection raised to the confirmation of Sebelius was over her position on abortion. While Sebelius awaited confirmation, the Kansas Legislature rapidly advanced a bill that would have imposed new restrictions on abortion providers who perform the procedure late in a pregnancy. Sebelius vetoed the bill April 23, prompting an early Senate supporter, Sam Brownback (R-KS) to announce he was reconsidering his support for her, although he ended up voting for her at the confirmation.

For more information on Secretary Sebelius: <http://www.hhs.gov/> •

Baucus and Kennedy Commit to Health Reform Legislation This Year

Senate Finance Committee Chair Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee Chair Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) sent a letter to President Obama April 20, 2009 affirming their commitment to mark up separate health care overhaul bills in both of their committees in June. The letter further stated "Our intention is for that legislation to be very similar, and to reflect a shared approach to reform, so that the measures that our two committees report can be quickly merged into a single bill for consideration on the Senate floor."

The Senate Finance Committee met on April 21 for the first of three roundtable discussions on health reform.

The House Education and Labor Committee sent a letter to President Obama on March 11 regarding their commitment to work together to pass national health reform.

To view the Senate letter: <http://finance.senate.gov/press/Gpress/2009/prg042009.pdf>

To view the House letter: <http://edlabor.house.gov/newsroom/2009/03/house-committee-chairmen-mille.shtml> •

Elder Justice Act Reintroduced in Senate and House

On April 2, the Elder Justice Act (S.795) was introduced in the U.S. Senate. The bill, sponsored by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), is a widely supported, bipartisan bill to address the growing problem of abuse, neglect and exploitation of older persons.

On April 20, Representative Peter King (R-NY) reintroduced the Elder Justice Act (H.R. 2006) in the House as well.

The Elder Justice Act is groundbreaking legislation that would create urgently needed federal support for struggling APS programs across the country. APS investigators, who operate under state law and funding in every state, are the front line responders to reports of elder abuse and abuse of adults with disabilities. In contrast to state child protective services, which are annually funded with billions of federal dollars, programs which protect vulnerable adults receive no federally appropriated funds. With state budgets in trouble and without any federal mandates, APS programs are being slashed just as the number of seniors is increasing dramatically. This bill would authorize a very modest \$100 million for APS annually.

In addition to funds to states to help them provide protective services to extremely vulnerable adults, other important goals contained in the bill include better data collection and more research to understand the scope

and nature of elder abuse. The Act also provides for needed federal coordination and oversight of elder abuse efforts across the country.

For more information, search the bill numbers on www.thomas.gov •

IN WASHINGTON

HHS Declares Swine Flu a Public Health Crisis

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a nationwide public health emergency declaration in response to recent human infections with newly discovered swine influenza A (swine flu) virus on April 27. The formal declaration of a Public Health Emergency (PHE) is a tool that facilitates HHS' preparation and mobilization for disasters and emergencies. This declaration, made under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act, will help HHS prepare for prevention and mitigation activities by enabling Food and Drug Administration (FDA) emergency use authorizations of drugs, devices, or medical tests under certain circumstances.

In addition to the declaration, HHS leaders are working together across agencies to coordinate response to the swine flu outbreak. The Administration on Aging is participating in daily calls with officials from the highest levels of government and closely monitoring the situation, and will continue to inform the national aging services network.

For more information: <http://www.aoa.gov/> •

NASUA News

The Newsletter of the National Association of State Units on Aging

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Medicare Announces Pilot Sites to Improve Quality for Patients Across Care Settings

On April 13, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the 14 communities around the nation that have been chosen for the Agency's Care Transitions Project, seeking to eliminate unnecessary hospital readmissions.

The goal of the Care Transitions Project is to improve health care processes so that patients, their caregivers, and their entire team of providers have what they need to keep patients from returning to the hospital for ongoing care needs. By promoting seamless transitions from the hospital to home, skilled nursing care, or home health care, this community-wide approach seeks, not only to reduce hospital readmissions but to yield sustainable and replicable strategies that achieve high-value health care for Medicare beneficiaries.

Communities in the following regions have been selected to participate in the Project: Providence, R.I.; Upper Capitol Region, N.Y.; Western Pennsylvania; Southwestern New Jersey; Metro Atlanta East, Ga.; Miami.; Tuscaloosa, Ala.; Evansville, Ind.; Greater Lansing Area, Mich.; Omaha, Neb.; Baton Rouge, La.; North West Denver, Colo.; Harlingen, Texas; and Whatcom County, Wash. The work of the Care Transitions Project will respond to the unique needs of each of the 14 communities. Each of the Care Transitions communities is led by a state Quality Improvement Organization (QIO).

CMS will monitor the success of this project by watching the rates at which patients in these communities return to the hospital. Re-admission rates for hospitals have been tracked by CMS for some time, and will be available to consumers later this year through the Hospital Compare Web site at <http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov>. The Care Transitions Project will continue in all 14 communities through summer 2011.

For more information: <http://www.cfmc.org/caretransitions/> •

Leadership Changes at CMSO

The Center for Medicaid and State Operations (CMSO) have made some leadership changes. Melissa Hulbert has finished out her detail as Acting Group Director and will be returning as the Director of Division for Advocacy and Special Issues (DASI) in the Disabled and Elderly Health Programs Group. Terry Pratt has been detailed as the Acting Group Director beginning tomorrow. Terry brings a wide range of long term care expertise and knowledge to the role. Ginni



Hain has been detailed as the Acting Deputy Director for the Roy Trudel will become Acting Director of Division of eligibility enrollment and outreach (DEEO). Susan Hill will return to her role in DEHPG as a Senior Policy Advisor. Carey Appold will continue her detail in DEHPG also as a Senior Policy Advisor and work relating to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA).

For more information: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/CMSLeadership/07_Office_CMSO.asp#TopOfPage •

NEW REPORTS AVAILABLE

AARP Study Finds Price of Brand-Name Prescription Drugs Increasing While Price of Generic Drugs Declines

Prices of the most frequently used brand-name prescription drugs are rising despite the current economic recession, but prices of generic drugs are declining and more older U.S. residents are switching to the lower-cost alternatives, according to an annual AARP

report released on Wednesday, the AP/Myrtle Beach Sun News reports. For the report, AARP examined the costs of the 219 most widely used brand-name drugs and found that manufacturers increased price on the drugs by 8.7% in 2008, compared with the general inflation rate of 3.8% over the same period. Acid reflux treatment Prevacid increased the most, at 30%, while depression drug Wellbutrin and sleep medication Lunesta were second and third at 21% and 20%, respectively.

According to the AP/Sun News, some financial analysts have said that the rising cost of prescription drugs can be attributed to drugmakers' attempts to increase profit during the current economic recession. In addition, some drugmakers have raised prices of certain drugs before their patent expires and generic versions of the treatment become available, the AP/Sun News reports.

Meanwhile, the costs of generic drugs declined by 10.6% on average in 2008, according to the report. AARP officials said they hope to continue persuading people to use more generic medications, as well as push lawmakers to focus on reducing drug prices. John Rother, AARP's public policy director, said, "Just about everybody in today's economy is feeling some economic pressures and it does not help that the drugs you take to keep healthy are much more expensive than last year."

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25th Annual Home and Community Based Services Conference

SEPTEMBER 20-23, 2009
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adding, “I think this makes the case for health reform.” Rother said the price increases help make the case for policy changes, such as allowing the government to negotiate drug prices and drug reimportation.

The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America called the report “one-sided,” saying that it focused on selective brand-name medicines. PhRMA Senior Vice President Ken Johnson said, “Unfortunately, AARP distorts the true, overall picture in hopes of dramatizing its report and deflecting attention from the millions of dollars it earns each year from its insurance businesses” (Werner, AP/Myrtle Beach Sun News, 4/15).

To view the report: http://www.aarp.org/research/health/drugs/rx_watchdog.html •

DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

Michael Burgess, Director, New York State Office on Aging

Michael Burgess was appointed to serve as the Director of the New York State Office for the Aging in February 2007. Prior to joining the Office for Aging, Burgess was the Executive Director of the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans, and for several years prior to that, was the Executive Director of the New York StateWide Senior Action Council. In those positions, he played a major role in the passage of landmark state legislation, including the EPIC prescription drug program and subsequent expansion of the EPIC program. Burgess also founded and served as the Executive Director of the Non-Profit Resource Center, an organization which worked to strengthen the capacity of smaller non-profit agencies so that they could better serve their constituents. He also served as Executive Director for the Statewide Emergency Network for Social and Economic Security.



He is the author of “To the Last Breath,” a book that chronicles the life and times of Rose Kryzak, a leader and role model who was involved in the Senior Action Movement for many years. Burgess began his career in Watertown, NY, his childhood home, working for the local anti-poverty community assistance program as Director of the Energy and Weatherization Program. He was born in Massena, New York and is a graduate of St. Lawrence University.

FUTURE GOAL: Burgess wants to have an “aging in the community” strategic plan for all regions of the state of New York.

GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT: He believes his greatest accomplishment is the *Community Empowerment Initiative*. In 2008 the initiative held a conference with over 500 attendees, which was inclusive of seniors and community organizations. The conference managed to bring people together to plan their own future for livable communities by involving all stakeholders for aging and independence.

INTERESTING FACT: Both Burgess’ paternal and maternal grandparents were Italian immigrants. He believes his early exposure to caring for them is what initially spurred his interest in aging. He resides in Albany, with his wife Katherine and they have two children. •

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RCI Evidence Based Caregiver Program Grant Opportunity

The Rosalyn Carter Caregiver Institute will be hosting webinar outlining a 2009-2010 Evidence-Based Programs for Family Caregivers Grant Opportunity. The deadline for submitting an Initial Interest Form for 2009-2010 funding from the RCI/J&J Program is Friday, May 29, 2009. Agencies interested in applying must designate at least one staff member to participate in the RCI’s free Technical Assistance Webinar Series. The first scheduled webinar will be an overview of the RCI’s grant process, and will provide information critical to the success of potential applicants. This webinar, titled “Getting Started—The RCI Bridge from Science to Service”, will be held on Thursday, May 14, 2009 at 11:00 a.m. EST. The webinar will run between 1 and 1 1/2 hours in length.

Upon receipt of a complete Initial Interest Form, you will be sent a link to register for the webinar. This link will prompt you for the e-mail address of the person(s) who are registering to participate in the webinar. If you have any questions, please e-mail Laura Granberry at: lbgran@gsm.edu

For more information: www.RosalynnCarter.org •



Patchwork of Hope Network Launches

The Patchwork of Hope Network (P.H.N.), is an educational campaign to raise awareness of postherpetic neuralgia, or after-shingles pain, among older Americans. After-shingles pain is an often debilitating condition that can affect not only those suffering, but their family and friends as well.

Shingles affects around one million people in the United States every year, and one in five of those people with shingles may develop after-shingles pain. The National Pain Foundation (NPF) is partnering with the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to lead the educational campaign, which is made possible with support from Endo Pharmaceuticals.

The P.H.N. campaign includes several live events throughout the year where attendees will hear presentations about after-shingles pain symptoms and treatment options, meet others affected by after-shingles pain and have an opportunity to create individual quilt squares to tell their story about how after-shingles pain has affected their lives.

The campaign has re-launched www.AfterShingles.com, an educational resource offering tools and information to help educate visitors about shingles and after-shingles pain, its impact on people's lives and steps to take to help manage the condition. The interactive Web site also features a question and answer section with a physician and an opportunity to decorate a virtual P.H.N. quilt square online. For every virtual quilt square made, Endo Pharmaceuticals will make a \$5 donation to the Visiting Nurse Associations of America (VNAA) to support shingles and PHN education.

The campaign kicks off on April 15th with educational events taking place in U.S. markets across the country, such as Miami, Dallas, San Diego, Chicago and concludes in New York during National Pain Month in September. •

For more information: www.AfterShingles.com •



HCBS Clearinghouse

HCBS.org, a Clearinghouse for Home and Community Based Services, has launched a brand new look and improved search capabilities. The design is in direct response to user requests, including enhanced search and browse features and opportunities to participate in an online community.

To view the clearinghouse: <http://www.hcbs.org> •

IN THE STATES

The Alabama Department of Senior Services Honored with Senior Citizens' Preparedness Award

The Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS) and Commissioner Irene Collins, First Vice President of NASUA, was honored at the 2009 National Hurricane Conference in Austin, Texas as the winner in the *Senior Citizens' Preparedness Award* category for development of the Safe Center concept.

The Safe Center concept, a storm-proof structure that provides a safe refuge for seniors in times of emergency, is the result of a partnership between ADSS, U.S. Administration on Aging, Alabama Emergency Management Agency and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

Since its conception, the initiative has continued to develop in response to needs identified for special populations after other hurricanes and tornados ravaged the state. Before the Safe Center was developed, there were no identified safe shelters for seniors to retreat to before or after a storm to regain a sense of normalcy and reconnect with friends. To advance this cause, Alabama broke ground on the nation's first safe center in Guin, Ala., in 2006—a landmark event toward ensuring the safety of Alabama's seniors by demonstrating a commitment to their well-being. Two years after the groundbreaking, the Guin Safe Center opened its doors and now serves as a model for other communities and the nation to combine a senior center that will be used daily with a safe center area that will provide a place of respite for seniors in the event of a disaster.

In addition to the Guin Safe Center, several other centers across the state are in the process of being built to achieve the goal of seven centers by 2010. AoA has recognized Alabama's Safe Center concept as an Older Americans Month Program Champion because it represents the efforts of the national administration to mod-

ernize community-based long term care and provide greater assurance that older people in the U.S. will maintain their independence in the community longer than ever before.

For more information: <http://www.adss.state.al.us/news.cfm> •

Idaho Senior Center Hosts Wii Bowling Tournament

The Lost Rivers Senior Citizens Center in Idaho recently hosted their first Wii Bowling tournament in conjunction with seniors and staff members from the Area VI Agency on Aging, Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, the Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership and all of the 16 Senior Centers in the nine county Eastern Idaho service area. The first annual tournament was held in part to “call attention to all of the fun activities taking place at the Lost Rivers Senior Center and maybe a Wii Bowling Tourney may help some people to come visit at the Senior Citizens Center,” said a Lost Rivers staff member.

For more information: <http://eicap.org/> •

Comings and Goings

Melanie McNeil has left her position as Director of Public Policy at NASUA to become a Patient Advocate for Kaiser Permanente in Atlanta, Georgia. •

OMBUDSMAN CORNER

CMS Nursing Home Guidelines Call for Home-like Setting

On Friday, April 10, The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) issued its new interpretive guidelines for state nursing home surveyors. These guidelines provide surveyors with detailed information on how to assess nursing home compliance with OBRA 1987 regulations, which cover issues related to physical environment, resident rights, and resident health and safety.

The changes, which go into effect on June 17, 2009, are intended to support efforts underway to transform nursing homes into “homey” environments through both environmental changes and resident-centered caregiving. Whereas in the past, these changes were sometimes stymied by fear that regulators would cite organizations for deficiencies, CMS is now making it clear that the OBRA regulations should be interpreted to support personal choice in the full range of daily activities, including waking, bathing, dining, and sleeping. The

new guidance also calls for visitors to have 24-hour access to residents, regardless of familial relationship.

The new interpretive guidelines call on nursing homes to begin or to continue de-institutionalizing their physical environments. Suggestions include: reducing noise such as overhead paging and alarm bells, eliminating nursing stations, taking down institutional signage, and refraining from serving meals on institutional trays.

According to the CMS memo: “A ‘homelike’ or homey environment is not achieved simply through enhancements to the physical environment. It concerns striving for person-centered care that emphasizes individualization, relationships, and a psychosocial environment that welcomes each resident and makes her/him comfortable.”

The new CMS interpretive guidelines are the outcome of last April’s historic symposium hosted by CMS and Pioneer Network. That conference focused on the impact of innovative environmental design on creating home and community for nursing home residents. Long-term care innovators, regulators, researchers, architects, advocates and public officials came together in an unprecedented dialogue to discuss regulatory challenges and other issues associated with transforming the physical environments of nursing homes into comfortable, pleasurable places for elders to call home.

For more information: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurveyCertificationGenInfo/PMSR/itemdetail.asp?filterType=dual,%20date&filterValue=7/d&filterByDID=3&sortByDID=4&sortOrder=ascending&itemID=CMS1221737&intNumPerPage=10> •

I&R CORNER

Food Stamp Benefits Increase with Record Number of Americans Receiving Food Assistance

December 2008 saw a record 31.8 million Americans receiving benefits from food stamps (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP). That’s up 2.2 percent from November 2008 and an increase of more than 700,000 people. The number also surpassed the September 2008 record total of 31.6 million, which included disaster benefits to victims of hurricanes and floods, according to the Food Research and Action Center. This month, SNAP benefits will rise 13% due to an increase included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed



consumer focused flyers in English and Spanish that describe the benefit increase. SNAP will receive \$20 billion over the next five years as part of the stimulus to the economy. Starting in April 2009, most four-person households will receive an \$80 increase in their monthly SNAP allotment to spend on groceries. The flyers, along with a chart outlining the expected increases, can be found on the USDA website.

For more information: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/recovery/recovery-snap.htm>. •

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Upcoming Events

2009 AARP Diversity & Aging Conference- The Power of Inclusion

June 8–10, 2009
Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile
Chicago, IL
For more information:
www.aarp.org/diversityandaging

Alzheimer's Association 2009 International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease

July 11–16, 2009
Reed Exhibition, Messe Wien Congress Center
Vienna, Austria
For more information: www.alz.org/ICAD

n4a 34th Annual Conference & Trade Show

July 19–22, 2009
Hilton Minneapolis
Minneapolis, Minnesota
For more information: www.n4a.org

Pioneer Network 9th National Conference

August 12–14, 2009
Little Rock, Arkansas
For more information: www.pioneernetwork

25th Annual Home and Community Based Services Conference

September 20–23, 2009
Sheraton Denver
Denver, Colorado
For more information: www.nasua.org

NASUA Annual Winter Membership Meeting

September 24, 2009
Sheraton Denver
Denver, Colorado
For more information: www.nasua.org



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