

Role of the Aging Network in Prevention and Wellness Provisions

January 14, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA), the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) and the National Council on Aging (NCOA), we encourage you to retain and improve the prevention and wellness provisions in your respective health care reform bills, as you work toward a final measure.

Our organizations—collectively representing the 56 State Units on Aging, 629 Area Agencies on Aging, 244 Title VI Native American aging programs and thousand of community organizations and local leaders serving seniors—are very supportive of efforts in the House and Senate bills to implement a national strategy and grant programs to support community-based prevention and wellness programs.

We believe the Senate provisions for a Prevention and Public Health Fund under Sec. 4002, Community Transformation Grants under Sec. 4201 and the “Healthy Aging, Living Well” program under Sec. 4202, in particular, will all go a long way toward providing more preventive health services and achieving the goal of reducing chronic diseases and addressing health disparities. We have specific comments, however, about how these provisions can be strengthened.


We believe that the final bill should provide a more defined role for the Administration on Aging and the national Aging Network under Sections 4002 and 4201 of the Senate bill and Section 3151 of the House bill. We are concerned that the legislation, as currently written in both the Senate and House versions, would inadvertently overlook tested and proven evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs for older adults that are currently being provided by the Aging Services Network under the Administration on Aging’s leadership.

In many cases the funds under these provisions are distributed through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and public health departments and are limited to programs authorized by the Public Health Service Act. While the CDC is certainly a key agency in delivering prevention and wellness activities, there are several other agencies within HHS that also administer prevention and wellness programs to specific populations, such as the Administration on Aging does for older adults. As drafted, the language in the House and Senate bills would preclude these other agencies from receiving funds.

We urge you to modify the language to allow the Secretary the flexibility to also distribute the funding through the Administration on Aging, as is currently done for successful evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention programs.

Thank you again for your commitment to investing in prevention and wellness programs in health reform. We strongly support these efforts, urge that the provisions discussed above be included in the final bill, and request that they be further strengthened to ensure that evidence-based programs serving older Americans, which have the potential for significant savings, are not overlooked.


Sincerely,



Martha Roherty
Executive Director
NASUA



Sandy Markwood
CEO
n4a



James P. Firman
President and CEO
NCOA

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Tom Harkin
The Honorable Christopher Dodd
The Honorable John Boehner, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Henry Waxman
The Honorable Charles Rangel
The Honorable George Miller