

American Geriatrics Society

Five Reasons Health Reform Helps Older Americans

Enhances the Geriatrics Workforce

Health care reform will build upon and enhance the geriatrics training programs under Title VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act. These programs train health care professionals to better meet the unique health care needs of older adults. Our nation is facing severe shortages of geriatrics health care workers just as the baby boomers are starting to retire. Without a sufficient number of providers who are trained in geriatrics, many of our nation's older adults will go without the high-quality health care that they need and deserve.

Provides Training for Direct Care Workers and Family Caregivers

Health care reform supports training opportunities and workforce development support for direct care workers in long-term care settings. Currently, there are 3 million direct care workers – with an anticipated 1 million additional workers needed within the next ten years. It will also provide training and support for family caregivers supporting frail elders and individuals with disabilities.

Provides Long Term Care Services and Supports

Health care reform includes provisions from the late Senator Kennedy's CLASS (Community Living Assistance Services and Supports) Act that will allow older Americans with functional disabilities to remain in their homes and communities. By establishing a new voluntary national insurance program this proposal will help adults who have or develop functional impairment to remain independent, employed and stay a part of their communities. Currently there are 10 million Americans in need of long term care services, and the number is expected to increase to near 15 million by 2020.

Supports care coordination and the team approach

Health care reform will also expand Medicare coverage to include needed services, such as care coordination for elders with multiple, complex chronic health problems. The bill will establish an Innovation Center within CMS to test, evaluate, and expand different payment structures and methodologies which aim to foster patient-centered care, improve quality, and slow the rate of Medicare cost growth. The bill also includes provisions to better manage care transitions and care coordination among providers and between settings. Such care has shown reduced preventable hospital re-admissions among older, vulnerable patients and lower costs.

Enhances the Primary Care Workforce

And, equally important, health care reform will expand training to prepare primary care physicians and other healthcare providers to better meet the unique healthcare needs of the aging population. Health care reform will establish a new bonus payment for primary care practitioners -- an important first step toward ameliorating the shortage of primary care providers, including those in geriatric medicine. The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), an independent Congressional agency, reported to Congress that patient access to high-quality primary care is essential for a well-functioning health care delivery system.