



ACCESS TO CARE: CHILDREN AND ELDERERS August 2009

ISSUE: The federal government plays a vital role in protecting public health and providing mental health services. The government can also assist in reducing the shortage of psychiatrists – particularly child and adolescent psychiatrist as well as geriatric psychiatrists. Congress is currently considering two measures that would train more psychiatrists either through loan forgiveness to the physician or grants to medical schools and teaching hospitals.

Workforce Training Legislation:

- ***The Child Mental Health Crisis Relief Act***, often referred to as the Child Workforce bill, passed the House of Representatives in March of 2007. Because the measure was not voted on by the Senate; Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) re-introduced the measure in April of 2009, H.R. 1932. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) introduced the Senate companion bill, S. 999. The measure addresses the critical national shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists (and other children's mental health professionals) by creating educational incentives to encourage people to enter these fields. For child and adolescent psychiatry training programs, the legislation extends the period of board eligibility for residents and fellows in child and adolescent psychiatry and creates a loan forgiveness program for use by child and adolescent psychiatrists.
- ***Retooling the Health Care Workforce for an Aging America Act of 2009*** has been introduced in the House by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) H.R. 468 and in the Senate. S. 245 by Senators Kohl (D-WI), Robert Casey (D-PA) and Blanche Lincoln (D-AR). Only 1 percent of all physicians (approximately 7,000) are certified geriatricians today, even as the population of older people is on track to double by 2030.

The bill addresses the shortage of geriatric psychiatrists, other physicians, medical personnel and mental health professionals. Medical schools and teaching hospitals may apply for grants to train may use the funds under such award to carry out a program to train individuals for either 1 year, 2 years, or both, who are seeking a certificate of added qualification or specialization in geriatrics for either 1 year, 2 years, or both. The bill also commissions an Institute of Medicine report on the composition of the mental health workforce that is needed to meet the needs of the aging population.

APA POSITION:

Congress should ensure that Americans have access to a well-trained, culturally competent mental health and substance use disorder workforce. Senators and Representatives are asked to cosponsor and support passage of S. 999, S. 245, H.R. 468, and H.R. 1932.