

U.S. House Passes SCHIP-Medicare Bill

Tuesday, 07 August 2007

Dear Headliners:

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Last night, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the State Children's Health Insurance and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act by a vote of 225 to 204. The CHAMP Act is broad healthcare legislation that would reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) (which provides health insurance to children from low-income families) and invest an additional \$48 billion dollars in the program over a period of five years. The bill is controversial because of disagreements over the expansion of children's health insurance, increase in the tobacco tax, and cuts in payments to Medicare managed care plans.

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The CHAMP Act also makes a number of changes to Medicare that ASHA supports, including:

- halting the scheduled 10% cut to the 2008 Medicare fee schedule rates and providing two years of positive updates (0.5% in 2008 and 0.5% in 2009);
- extending the exceptions process to the Medicare therapy caps for two years (currently, the exceptions process is scheduled to expire at the end of 2007);
- allowing private-practice speech-language pathologists to bill Medicare directly (H.R. 1774 & S. 45); and
- freezing further implementation of Medicare's so-called "75% Rule" on inpatient rehabilitation facilities.

Although ASHA has concerns about some provisions in the 462-page legislation, it supports the bill and will continue to work toward fixing the provisions that raise concerns. It is unclear whether the CHAMP Act, and the Medicare provisions included in it, will become law. The Senate version of the bill does not address Medicare and the President has threatened to veto the bill. ASHA will continue urging Congress to keep the Medicare provisions described above in the bill as it moves through the legislative process. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Munding, ASHA's Director of Federal and Political Advocacy, by e-mail at emunding@asha.org or by phone at 800-498-2071, ext. 4473.

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