



Wisconsin Health Care Association

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WHCA Applauds Wisconsin Congressional Leaders for Helping to Lead Effort to Block \$770 Million in Bush Medicare Cuts

Bipartisan Efforts Oppose \$16.7 Million Cut to State Medicare Beneficiaries

MADISON - The Wisconsin Health Care Association (WHCA) and the American Health Care Association (AHCA) today praised Representatives Tammy Baldwin (D-2), Ron Kind (D-3), and Steve Kagen (D-8) for helping lead a bipartisan effort in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives to prevent the Bush Administration from moving forward with regulatory-driven cuts to seniors' Medicare Part A nursing home funding - cuts that will result in Wisconsin seniors losing \$16.7 million in the year ahead.

Specifically, Representatives Baldwin, Kind and Kagen joined U.S. Reps. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) in a letter issued to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt. The letter expresses their "deep concern" that high-quality skilled nursing care for America's seniors will be threatened if the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) moves forward with an administrative proposal - in the coming weeks - that would cut \$770 million in Medicare funding for skilled nursing facility (SNF) care in 2009 and more than \$4 billion over the next five years.

"It is significant that our state's leaders in Washington have joined the efforts in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House to speak out and oppose the Bush Administration's damaging Medicare funding reductions," said Tom Moore, WHCA Executive Director. "On behalf of Wisconsin's Medicare beneficiaries and the providers who care for them, we thank them. These policymakers have objectively looked at how these cuts will hurt Wisconsin's Medicare beneficiaries, and are acting to protect their elderly constituents."

Bruce Yarwood, President and CEO of the American Health Care Association (AHCA), added, "Lawmakers of both parties, in both chambers, have stepped up to oppose the Bush Administration on this important health policy matter because it makes little sense to first hurt seniors' care, and then do so in a manner wasteful of tax dollars. This is bad, ill-considered policy from the Bush Administration, and the facts simply do not support proceeding with these Medicare funding cuts."

The state and national long term care leaders noted that existing Medicare policy was designed to encourage the movement of certain high-acuity Medicare beneficiaries to skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). As a result, the site of care for a significant number of high acuity patients appropriately shifted to SNFs, and a recent independent analysis shows that this shift saved Medicare an estimated \$709 million." (Source: Avalere Health, LLC)

The letter to HHS Sec. Leavitt joined by Reps. Baldwin, Kind and Kagen warns the planned Medicare changes "will jeopardize the significant quality improvements made by the SNF community in recent years as well as the ability of SNFs to continue caring for high acuity patients.

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Because SNFs rely on Medicare to make up for chronic underfunding by the Medicaid program – an average of \$13 per day for every Medicaid beneficiary in nursing homes nationwide – it is critically important that Medicare reimbursement remain fair and consistent. We believe that if CMS were to finalize its proposed rule, the ability of providers to care for our nation’s most vulnerable population – the frail elderly and disabled – would be severely threatened.”

The complete text of the letter to HHS Sec. Leavitt and list of co-signers available at www.ahca.org.

The Wisconsin Health Care Association (WHCA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to representing, protecting and advancing the interests of over 190 Wisconsin nursing facilities, their 28,000 employees and the 27,000 residents they serve. WHCA’s strength, effectiveness, and integrity are significantly enhanced by the diversity of its membership which includes proprietary, non-profit, and government-operated facilities.