

Home care and hospice providers from Nebraska will join hundreds of colleagues in Washington D.C. to keep the fight alive for the critical, high-value, high-quality care that is delivered every day to some of the nation's most vulnerable individuals.

Nebraska Association of Home and Community Health Agencies is taking part in the annual March on Washington and Law Symposium Conference and Exposition hosted by the National Association for Home Care & Hospice, March 27 - 30 at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel in DC.

The event will address current hot topics in health care legislation, regulatory matters, technology and hospice and allow attendees to hear from more than 50 speakers, including senior political analyst for CNN, David Gergen and former director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Julie Gerberding.

"Nebraska is a state blessed in so many ways, with good, caring folks who care for others, no matter what the care setting," said Shaun Meyer RN, president elect, Nebraska Association of Home and Community Health Agencies.

"We want to ensure that very care is available to those who need it most, and where they want it the most...in their own home."

Meyer is the director of Home Health Services for Perkins County Health Services in Grant.

She has served on the Nebraska Home Health Board of Directors since 2001, and is currently holding the president elect position for the second time.

Recently, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), issued a report recommending Congress impose a new co-payment obligation on Medicare home health patients and that provider payment rates be cut in several ways starting in 2012 and thereafter. NAHC is calling on Congress to improve home care for seniors.

Unfortunately, if Congress were to adopt MedPAC's recommendations, the opposite would occur – seniors and disabled Americans would suffer, and costs would rise for patients, families, and the Medicare program.

A strong home health care system is essential to the health and economic well-being of millions of seniors and disabled Americans. Home-based care is clinically effective, utilizing advanced technologies and helping to cost-effectively manage chronic diseases that account for 75 percent of the nation's health care spending.

Millions of America's seniors and disabled citizens depend on it and NAHC is urging Congress and the administration to reject both the extended 2012 funding reduction and the requirement that seniors pay out of pocket.

While 2010 was an important year with the unprecedented health care reform bill, it is essential to keep vigilant and educate members of Congress about home care's ability to transform and right a system out of balance, and what it means to patients across the United States.

With a recent AARP study revealing that 75 percent of Americans 45+ surveyed want to stay in their home as long as possible and with baby boomers starting to turn 65 this year- there will be a large need for qualified home health care providers to meet the demand.

Job growth in the industry is expected to increase an astounding 48 percent by 2018 making it imperative to continue fighting for high quality, cost-effective care for the nation's most vulnerable citizens.

Home care employment increased by an average of 6.2 percent annually from 1999 to 2008 and is expected to rise by 50 percent more by 2018.

“We can continue to waste precious resources on institutional care or we can embrace proven solutions to meeting the health care needs of our growing senior population—home health care and hospice services,” said Val J. Halamandaris, president of National Association for Home Care and Hospice.

“Not only is home care the right way to save billions in Medicare expenditures, it is what our seniors need to meet their increasing and complicated health care conditions. Our goal with this march is to educate elected officials to avoid obstacles to this care.”

The annual march comes at a time when \$12 billion in Medicare cuts to the industry are already planned over the next few years even though home care and hospice is more cost effective, saving billions in Medicare expenditures.

In 2009, the average home care visit cost \$135 per day versus the average hospital visit which cost \$1,500 a day. Preventive home health care saves Medicare and Medicaid billions of dollars per year.

“It is an honor and privilege to meet with those who represent us in Washington D.C.,” said Meyer.

“They are good, hardworking people, with pressures from all sides. The representatives from Nebraska have all been supportive of Home Care, in the six years I have traveled to the beautiful, history-filled city to voice my concerns. I will be attending the noted ‘Nebraska Breakfast’, which I have attended every year I have gone. I love it!”

“I would encourage anyone who has the chance to visit, to do it. I could go for many years and still not absorb all of the history. There is nothing like being on ‘the hill’.”

“It is easy to sit back in Nebraska and criticize those who represent us in D.C. But, once you visit there, you see that those folks are getting pressures from all sides to support everyone’s priority...and it isn’t always the same as yours.

“The important thing is to remember we are blessed to be able to have a voice, so use it!”