



November 26, 2007

Senate lawmakers get set to debate much-anticipated Medicare changes. The [Senate Finance Committee](#) plans to mark up a Medicare package the first week of December, as staffers are busy still fine tuning the details. The package is likely to address a number of critical Medicare issues, including the impending cuts to physician payments and potential reductions in Medicare Advantage program. NACHC continues to work closely with the Committee in an effort to secure the inclusion of the [MATCH Act \(S. 2188\)](#) in the package. Introduced by Senators [Jeff Bingaman \(D-NM\)](#) and [Olympia Snowe \(R-ME\)](#), the legislation would restructure Medicare reimbursements to Federally Qualified Health Centers to ensure adequate payment of Medicare services. To learn more and get involved in the effort to help pass the MATCH Act, click [here](#).

SCHIP reauthorization adrift after negotiations break down. Despite long hours of work and negotiations, lawmakers were unable to reach a compromise on SCHIP reauthorization before heading off for the Thanksgiving recess, setting up the real possibility that Congress may not reach a successful deal before the end of the year. Negotiations have been ongoing since the House and Senate each approved a second version of SCHIP reauthorization legislation earlier this month. That bill, [H.R. 3963](#), has not been sent to the president because he has vowed to veto. Lawmakers continue hope that a compromise on a comprehensive reauthorization of SCHIP can be reached. However, several major issues such as rules for coverage, eligibility, citizenship verification, and the phasing out of adult coverage, must be ironed out before the bill might ultimately be passed. Negotiations on the bill could continue in December. However, should they not produce a bill, the future of SCHIP remains "unclear," because Democrats "might have trouble passing even an SCHIP extension stretching into fall 2008." Funding for the program expires on Dec. 14, and the possibility of another short-term fix looks increasingly unlikely as lawmakers look to address other pending issues, including Medicare. Stay tuned for the latest NACHC updates and action alerts!

Mental health parity is stalled for now in Congress. Just as bipartisan momentum was going smoothly, a few snags came up over the bill's \$4 billion price tag and disagreements between the sponsors of the House and Senate versions. [U.S. Representatives Patrick Kennedy \(D-RI\)](#), and [Jim Ramstad, \(R-MN\)](#) have been in near-constant negotiations with [U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici \(R-NM\)](#), and Patrick's dad, [Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Edward Kennedy \(D-MA\)](#), over possible compromises. Central to negotiations are concerns about provisions requiring insurers and employers to cover disorders listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, based on concerns that language in the manual might prompt insurers to offer more limited mental health coverage or to drop it entirely. Look for updates as negotiations continue.

Thanks to everyone that completed the survey of Health Center Employee Insurance Coverage!! Nearly 500 health centers stepped up to the plate in response to the recent NACHC survey, the results of which will be critical as we continue our work on legislation ([H.R. 1518 and S. 2186](#)) to allow health centers to participate in the Federal Employee Health Benefits

Program (FEHBP). [Click here to send a message to your Member of Congress](#) to let them know how important access to FEHBP is to your health center!

Speaking of health insurance costs: A new [survey](#) from the benefit firm Mercer indicates that fewer small employers were offered health insurance this year than in years passed. According to the survey, the percentage of employers with 200 workers or fewer offering any kind of health insurance fell to 61 percent this year from 63 percent in 2006. That drop came even as the cost of high-deductible plans with tax-free savings accounts averaged \$5,970 per worker per year. Read more about the survey findings [here](#), in a recent article by [USA Today](#).

In the Media spotlight: [Golden Valley Health Center](#) in Modesto, CA was front and center in an [article](#) in the *Modesto Bee* discussing affordable care for the chronically ill. The article noted that nationally “. . . community health centers are dealing with rising costs of providing care and a dramatic increase in patients with chronic diseases -- fully a quarter of patient visits are for treatment of chronic illness, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.” We couldn’t have said it better ourselves!

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I appreciate your applause, but I'd rather have your votes."

-- House Appropriations Chairman Obey, on the House floor after Republicans erupted in applause when he said he would not take the full hour for debate on a vote to override a veto of the FY08 Labor-HHS spending bill.