

Pharmacy organizations promote profession in Congress' stimulus bill

APhA, Food Marketing Institute, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and National Community Pharmacists Association ask for health IT support, no new privacy requirements in economic stimulus bill.

December 29, 2008 - In a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-UT) and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), APhA and three other industry groups pushed Congress to include support for health information technology (HIT) in their proposed economics stimulus package. APhA and the Food Marketing Institute, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and National Community Pharmacists Association asked Congress to make pharmacists and pharmacies eligible for HIT grants while avoiding "unworkable" new privacy provisions.

The organizations expressed their agreement that HIT "has the potential to save lives, improve the value of care, and spur new discoveries and medical innovation." Because of this potential, and because pharmacists and pharmacies are "an integral part of their local communities and the health care delivery team," the organizations urged Congress to specifically extend grant eligibility to pharmacy.

The letter also requests proper representation in any policymaking groups created by the legislation, pointing out that the umbrella term of 'health care provider' includes a wide range of practices and arguing, "Health care providers themselves are as diverse as the other entities that would comprise the bodies created by legislation."

However, the groups wrote that their "primary concern" was to ensure that any potential legislation would not "interfere with pharmacies' ability to provide the communications necessary to ensure high quality patient care while ensuring adequate protections for protected health information (PHI)." The letter supports the PHI provisions in the current HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules, which "received significant public comment during the rulemaking process (more than 50,000 comments) and provide patients with adequate protection."

Pointing out that HIT privacy issues have been debated for more than a year without reaching a consensus, the organizations cautioned that it "would be premature or even ill-advised for Congress to attempt to legislate substantively in an area that remains highly contentious." Instead, the letter urges Congress to continue holding hearings to obtain a wide spectrum of opinions on privacy issues and create a consensus among all interested parties.