

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

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The 100-Day Plan to End Homelessness

(Second in a Series)

Accomplishments during their first hundred days are often the measure of newly-elected Presidents and Congresses. As the 110th Congress begins its work, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council proposes a series of measures that – if enacted by the Congress – would dramatically diminish the crisis of mass homelessness in our country. These items are presented not so much in order of their importance, but with regard for their timeliness as to the Congressional agenda. Item One was enactment of a livable wage that would allow minimum wage workers to afford housing

Item Two: The Health Care Safety Net ACT TODAY!

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council has long advocated improved mainstream health and human services programs as preferable to targeted safety net programs. Universal health insurance, for example, is the gold standard of mainstream approaches. Justice demands more than a system that provides health insurance for some and an inadequate system of safety net providers and unaffordable bills for others.

However, we have supported the on-going expansion of the targeted Health Care for the Homeless programs that we represent, and the Consolidated Health Center Program of which HCH is a part, for two chief reasons:

HCH services are necessary to relieve current suffering and to save human life.

Over 700,000 homeless persons obtain their primary care at Health Centers each year. Largely without health insurance and at greatly increased risk of illness and death compared to other Americans, many would go without care unless HCH and other Health Centers were available. Health Centers still serve only a small fraction (perhaps one-fifth) of the Americans who experience homelessness each year, even though a series of recent appropriations increases through the President's Health Center Growth Initiative has allowed the creation of new health care access points and critical strengthening of existing programs. Massive unmet need was reported in Health Center New Access Point applications received by the Health Resources and Services Administration in December.

Today's safety net will be a key component of tomorrow's health care infrastructure. When universal health insurance is instituted, it will provide payment for health care services, but it will not necessarily restructure the delivery system. The community-based clinics that serve poor Americans may in fact experience dramatically increased demand once all financial barriers to needed care are removed. As issues of financing health care are pursued in the 110th Congress, the capacity to deliver care must not be neglected.

Appropriations Limbo

The recently-departed 109th Congress was unable to settle on appropriations for most of the government for the current fiscal year, which began on October 1. The new 110th Congress is considering simply extending last year's spending levels until it can agree on priorities for next year. However, a few key programs may be considered for special treatment, and Health Centers, including Health Care for the Homeless, must be elevated to that priority status in the eyes of the Congress. Congress is expected to act on its "continuing resolution" this week.

The unfinished work of the 109th Congress included a pending \$181 million increase for Health Centers; 8.7% of that would be targeted to the needs of homeless people. The December 6 round of New Access Point applications was predicated on this appropriations increase. Without additional funds in FY07, there will be no new access points, no base grant adjustments to cover increasing costs, and no expanded medical capacity grants for health centers.

ACTION

Contact your Senator or Representative's office today to ask that an increase of \$181 million for the Consolidated Health Centers (Section 330 of the Public Health Services Act) be included in the year-long spending resolution.

- Stress the unmet need that exists in your community.
- Comment on your pending New Access Point application, if you made one.
- Remind your representative that 115 American communities just marked the known deaths of over 2200 homeless persons in 2006, during National Homeless Persons Memorial Day, and that the increased risk of illness and death among the poorest Americans requires an urgent response.
- Ask that your representative pass on the request to the leaders of the Appropriations Committees and the political parties

Call your representatives at 202-224-2131 or send your message from <http://grassroots.nachc.com/Core.aspx?AID=244&APP=GAC&IssueID=8884>

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