



Improve Patients' Access to Pharmacist Services
Co-Sponsor H.R. 592/S. 314 the *Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas*
Enhancement Act

As the U.S. healthcare system continues to evolve, a prevailing issue will be the adequacy of access to affordable, quality healthcare. The national physician shortage coupled with the continued expansion of health insurance coverage in 2015 will have serious implications for the nation's healthcare system. Access, quality, cost and efficiency in healthcare are all critical factors – especially to the medically underserved. Without ensuring access to requisite healthcare services for this vulnerable population, it will be very difficult for the nation to achieve the aims of healthcare reform.

The medically underserved population includes seniors with cultural or linguistic access barriers, residents of public housing, persons with HIV/AIDS, as well as rural populations and many others. Significant consideration should be given to innovative initiatives within the medically underserved population to enhance healthcare capacity and strengthen community partnerships to offset provider shortages and the surge in individuals with healthcare coverage.

Pharmacists play an increasingly important role in the delivery of services, including key roles in new models of care beyond the traditional fee-for-service structure. Pharmacists are engaged with other professionals and participating in models of care based on quality of services and outcomes, such as accountable care organizations (ACOs). Pharmacists now commonly provide immunizations and medication therapy management (MTM) services. Legislation introduced by Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), S. 776, the *Medication Therapy Management Empowerment Act of 2015*, would expand eligibility for MTM services to beneficiaries with specific single chronic conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, COPD, and high cholesterol. These conditions have been shown to respond especially well to treatments like MTM that improve medication adherence, leading to better outcomes and reduced overall costs. NACDS is working with House members to introduce companion legislation in the near future. We continue to urge Congress to support this important legislation as well as work with the Administration to make regulatory changes that expand beneficiary access to this important program.

In addition to MTM, pharmacists are capable of providing many other cost-saving services (subject to state scope of practice laws). Examples include access to health tests, helping to manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, plus immunizations. However, the lack of pharmacist recognition as a provider by third party payors including Medicare and Medicaid limits the number and types of services pharmacists can provide, even though fully qualified to do so. Retail pharmacies are often the most readily accessible healthcare provider. Research shows that nearly all Americans (89%) live within five miles of a retail pharmacy. Such access is vital in reaching the medically underserved.

We urge you to increase access to much-needed services for underserved Medicare beneficiaries by co-sponsoring H.R. 592/S. 314, the *Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act*, which will allow Medicare Part B to utilize pharmacists to their full capability by providing those underserved beneficiaries with services (subject to state scope of practice laws) not currently reaching them. Private estimates of this legislative change reflect costs in the single-digit billion dollar range over ten years. However, this important legislation would lead not only to reduced overall healthcare costs, but also to increased access to healthcare services and improved healthcare quality.

**We urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 592/S. 314 and
work towards enactment in the 114th Congress.**

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