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Federal Investments Critical in Geriatric Workforce Training

Quality of Care for Growing Older Population at Stake, Coalition Tells Congress

Washington – Investments in geriatric workforce training programs are essential for ensuring America’s health care workforce is prepared to care for our rapidly expanding population of older adults, the Eldercare Workforce Alliance (EWA) told Congress in written testimony to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

“Within twenty years, one in five Americans will be over 65 and 90 percent of them will have one or more chronic conditions,” wrote the Eldercare Workforce Alliance, a coalition of 28 national organizations dedicated to addressing the eldercare workforce shortage. “Yet there is a growing shortage of clinicians with special training in geriatrics and an even greater shortage of the geriatrics faculty needed to train the entire workforce.”

The Alliance called on Congress to appropriate the necessary funding and pointed to provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that enhance existing and establish new geriatrics programs to build the capacity of the healthcare workforce needed to care for older adults. The coalition called funding for these programs critical to addressing this severe and growing shortage.

In the testimony to both House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Resources, Education and Related Agencies, the Eldercare Workforce Alliance urged Congress to fund the geriatrics training programs adequately in FY 2012 in order to immediately begin addressing the care needed for the nation’s rapidly expanding population of older adults.

Citing the accomplishments of current programs, EWA requested $54.9 million to fund Title VII (Geriatrics Health Professions) and Title VIII (Geriatrics Nursing Workforce Development programs) of the Public Health Service Act. Title VII programs are the only federal programs that increase the number of faculty with geriatrics expertise and offer geriatrics training to the entire healthcare workforce.
These programs have realized success through geriatric academic awards, education centers, and training programs. The new training programs will increase the number of geriatric experts in the workforce.

Title VIII is the primary source of federal funding for advanced education nursing, workforce diversity, nursing faculty loan programs, education, loan repayment and scholarships. Through the Comprehensive Geriatric Education Program, 27 grantees provided 459 geriatric training and classes to more than 6,800 nurses, nursing students, home health aides, faculty and others in the 2009-2010 academic year.

“We understand that the Committee faces difficult budget decisions,” stated Nancy Lundebjerg, EWA co-convener along with Steven Dawson. “However, we strongly believe that by investing in these programs, we will be delivering better care to America’s older adults. In addition, health care dollars will be saved through better care coordination and health outcomes, and the workforce will grow as more people are recruited, trained, and retained in the field of geriatrics.”

The Eldercare Workforce Alliance’s 28 national organizations are united by a commitment to address the eldercare workforce shortage in order to ensure that our parents and grandparents receive quality care in settings of their choice.