



Health Information Technology

ACTION NEEDED:

NAHU urges Congress to pass legislation that encourages the adoption of health information technology. We are currently tracking the following bills:

H.R. 4157—The Health Information Technology Promotion Act

H.R. 4641—ADOPT HIT

H.R. 4642—The Wired for Health Care Quality Act

S. 1262—The Health Technology to Enhance Quality Act

S.1418—The Wired for Health Care Quality Act

Except S. 1418, all of the above bills have been introduced and sent to their respective jurisdictional committees. S. 1418 passed the Senate in November 2005 and has been sent to the House.

BACKGROUND:

NAHU believes that the use of modern information technology in health care offers huge opportunities to improve health care for consumers by increasing quality and lowering costs. The health care industry must be brought up to date technologically, and the widespread use of electronic health records will help ensure Americans receive high-quality medical care by providing doctors access to patient information at the time of care.

Reduce errors

Currently, the majority of medical records are kept on paper, which can be lost, damaged, hard to read or hard to access in a crisis situation. Electronic health records can help to reduce medical errors by providing complete patient histories, computerized ordering and electronic reminders. They will reduce errors when a pharmacist cannot read a physician's handwriting and will protect privacy by only allowing authorized individuals to access records. EHRs will also have internal checks for things such as negative drug interactions, which may not be systematically checked by the physician.

Lower costs

It is estimated that HIT can reduce health care costs up to 20% each year by saving time and reducing duplication. Patient visits will be more efficient as they will not have to give their address, insurance information and other basic information multiple times. EHRs will also reduce duplication and waste by showing physicians when tests or treatments may not be necessary.

Higher quality of care

HIT will enable true collaboration between doctors and patients as consumers make more informed choices and doctors become more involved in their care. EHRs will make it easier for consumers to get accurate care from different physicians because up-to-date information will be available electronically. In the long run, EHRs will also provide better information to track public health problems and advance clinical research.

President Bush has established a national goal of making EHRs available to all Americans by 2014. The FY07 budget request includes \$169 million for HIT initiatives, which represents a \$58 million increase over FY06. The Administration supports the adoption of HIT as a normal cost of doing business to ensure patients receive high-quality care. To encourage doctors and patients to adopt EHRs, the Administration's goal is to promote conditions for a free market.

