

October 22, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

The undersigned National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Stakeholder associations support using the new NHSC Fund authorized under the Affordable Care Act (ACA, P.L. 111-148) to the greatest extent possible. The coalition represents the multiple health professionals, institutions, and underserved areas/populations that benefit from the program's scholarship and loan repayment awards.

The NHSC is widely recognized—both in Washington and in the underserved areas it helps—as a success on many fronts. It improves access to health care for the growing numbers of rural and urban underserved Americans, provides incentives for practitioners to enter primary care, reduces the financial burden that the cost of health professions education places on new practitioners, and helps ensure access to health professions education for students from all socio economic backgrounds.

In spite of the NHSC's success, demand for health professionals across the country remains high. At a field strength of 4,760 in FY 2009, the NHSC fell more than 24,000 practitioners short of fulfilling the need for primary care, dental, and mental health practitioners in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), as estimated by HRSA. While the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" (P.L. 111-5) provided a temporary boost in annual awards, this increase in field strength must be sustained to help address the increasing health professionals workforce shortage and growing maldistribution.

With the unprecedented increase in access to health insurance made possible by ACA expected to exacerbate the shortage of health professionals, the full NHSC Fund is necessary to address manpower deficiencies by increasing new NHSC annual awards, opportunities, benefits, and ultimately the total NHSC field strength. This was a primary recommendation of the National Advisory Council's March 2007 report, "Priorities for Reauthorization and Legislative Updates" and a goal of health care reform.

The NHSC Stakeholders support ACA, which authorizes up to \$414 million for the NHSC in FY 2011 through discretionary appropriations and provides up to \$290 million through the new NHSC Fund at the discretion of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). Furthermore, we support report language accompanying the Senate's FY 2011 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations measure (S.Rept. 111-243) that anticipates HHS combining FY 2011 Labor-HHS discretionary funds together with the full \$290 million appropriated under ACA. Use of the NHSC Fund to the greatest extent possible will help recruit the health professionals necessary to care for our nation's underserved. Should you have any questions, please contact Matthew Shick at <mshick@aamc.org> or 202-862-6116.

Sincerely,

The National Health Service Corps Stakeholder associations

Cc: Mary Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N.
Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration
Rebecca Spitzgo
Director, National Health Service Corps

Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Physician Assistants
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians
American College of Physicians
American Dental Education Association
American Hospital Association
American Medical Association
American Medical Student Association
American Nurses Association
American Osteopathic Association
Academic Pediatric Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Academic Health Centers
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Community Health Nursing Educators
Association of Departments of Family Medicine
Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors of Internal Medicine
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine
Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU Healthcare
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Counties
National Association of Rural Health Clinics
National Rural Health Association
North American Primary Care Research Group
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of General Internal Medicine
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine