

Obama Unveils Revised Health Reform Plan as 270 HME Providers Meet Lawmakers Today on Capitol Hill

Kicking off the AAHomecare Washington Legislative Conference yesterday morning, AAHomecare President Tyler Wilson said, "You're here in Washington at a pivotal moment in the nation's ongoing discussion about healthcare." The 270 HME providers and stakeholders attending the conference came to Washington in the middle of what may prove to be the make or break moment for the long healthcare debate. Last week, the President held the historic televised bipartisan summit on healthcare reform.

Today, as HME providers fanned out across Capitol Hill for more than 300 meetings with lawmakers, President Obama announced his revised health reform legislation. The President said his plan has "included most of the serious ideas" that have emerged from Democrats and Republicans, including recommendations made by Republicans last week.

While Democrats in Congress hash through questions about how to proceed toward votes on the revised healthcare package, HME providers were in congressional offices today asking their Senators and Representatives to preserve homecare, the most cost-effective setting for post-acute care.

The top goal for AAHomecare legislative conference participants today is gaining broader congressional support for H.R. 3790, the bill introduced by Rep. Kendrick Meek. The bill would repeal the "competitive" bidding program in a fiscally responsible way. Yesterday, Congressman Jason Altmire (D-Pa.) told AAHomecare conference attendees that the President's revised healthcare bill is one possible legislative vehicle for the provisions in the Meek bill. Currently, 152 members of the House of Representatives have formally signed on as cosponsors, and HME providers in Washington today report additional commitments from their legislators. At an AAHomecare reception on Monday evening, Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-Ga.), a physician, announced that he would sign on.

Another legislative priority for the week is galvanizing support for the Home Oxygen Patient Protection Act of 2009 (HOPP Act), H.R. 2373, which was introduced by Representative Tom Price (R-Ga.) and Heath Shuler (D-N.C.). The bill would repeal the 36-month cap on oxygen and restore oxygen payments for the period of medical need. AAHomecare supports the HOPP Act with improvements that link reimbursement to beneficiary need, patient protections, and sparing oxygen payments from further reductions.

Other priorities include preserving the option to purchase power wheelchairs when initially prescribed. Many providers will be unable to furnish power wheelchairs to beneficiaries if this purchase option is eliminated. And HME providers in Washington today are asking Congress to reject the tax on medical devices for manufacturers of home medical equipment since taxing all medical devices equally is simply not cost-effective health care.