



**American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
American College of Nurse Practitioners
Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties**

November 11, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray, Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on
Deficit Reduction
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling, Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee on
Deficit Reduction
129 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray and Congressman Hensarling:

On behalf of the 148,000 nurse practitioners across the country represented by the undersigned organizations, we write to express our appreciation for the important work you have undertaken to reduce our federal budget deficit in a prudent, bipartisan manner. As you examine various options to address spending on health care, we urge you to make significant changes that will improve access to care and the cost-efficient delivery of services by eliminating barriers that currently prevent nurse practitioners from practicing to the full extent of *their* education and clinical preparation. Nurse practitioners (NPs) are integral to an improved delivery system – better access, better care, and lower cost. They are essential providing a cost effective solution to the shortage of physicians. In order to achieve potential savings, barriers to practice and participation must be removed and funding for education and training must be preserved and improved. The committee should take action to achieve these efficiencies.

Nurse practitioners have assumed an increasing role in health care delivery, especially for underserved populations. A growing number of states authorize nurse practitioners to be licensed independent practitioners. NPs complete graduate programs that include education, training, and practice experience needed to complete a national board certification examination before entry into practice. They are qualified, safe providers who can make an impact on the health care needs of the nation, if barriers to their practice are removed.

The evidence is clear. “*Advanced Practice Nurse Outcomes 1990-2008: A Systematic Review*,” published in September/October 2011 issue of *Nursing Economic*, concludes that “...APRNs provide effective and high-quality patient care, (and) have an important role in improving the quality of patient care in the United States.” In its landmark 2010 report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” the Institute of Medicine (IOM) declared, “Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health care professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States.” The IOM called for the elimination of barriers to practice, recommending, “Advanced practice registered nurses should be able to practice to the full extent of their education and training.” Specifically, the Institute called on Congress to expand the Medicare program to include coverage of advanced practice registered nurse services that are within the scope of practice under applicable state law, just as physician services are now covered.

The IOM also supported amending Medicare statutes “to authorize advanced practice nurses to perform admission assessments, as well as certification of patients for home health services and for admission to hospice and perform admission examinations in skilled nursing facilities.” Legislation currently before Congress would take a major step in this direction. The “Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2011” (S. 227/H.R. 2267), introduced by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Representatives Greg Walden (R-OR) and Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), would authorize nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, clinical nurse specialists and physician assistants to order Medicare home health services. Independent experts estimate that this improvement would save the Medicare program approximately \$309 million over ten years.

The IOM also calls for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to amend Medicare Hospital Conditions of Participation to ensure that advanced practice registered nurses are eligible for admitting privileges, clinical privileges, and membership on medical staff. Savings resulting from this policy could be credited to Congress with the adoption of legislation requiring CMS to eliminate this barrier.

Nurse-Managed Health Clinics (NMHC), funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration, offer an important alternative, providing primary care and wellness services to vulnerable underserved patient populations. These clinics may be associated with a school, college, university or department of nursing, a federally qualified health center, or an independent nonprofit health or social services agency. Under the management of nurse practitioners, these facilities provide greater access to primary care services that directly contributes to improved patient outcomes and more cost-effective care.

The critical need for expanding the country’s health care workforce must weigh into your deliberations. The Nursing Workforce Development programs authorized under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act provided critical support for the recruitment, education, and retention of more than 347,000 nurses and nursing students as well as numerous academic nursing institutions and healthcare facilities between FY 2006 and FY 2009. Nurse practitioners and APRNs rely upon Title VIII support to complete their education and offset this considerable educational expense. Programs like Title VIII will be essential in the coming years as the demand for nursing services, particularly in health professional shortage and medically underserved areas.

Thank you again for your efforts to reach agreement on a prudent course for dealing with the financial challenges facing our nation. We believe that nurse practitioners can make an important contribution to this effort if they are truly able to fulfill the vision of the Institute of Medicine and provide the full range of services we are taught to perform. We look forward to working with you to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

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cc: The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Patrick Toomey

The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable Xavier Becerra