

Health Care Reform Will Help Improve Workforce Shortage

Will Offer Training, Scholarship, Loan Opportunities

By U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Arkansas)

Health care professionals play a critical role in the lives of all Americans, providing care and comfort when we need it the most. The job is not an easy one: in my home state of Arkansas, I've heard from nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals about the challenges they face providing care and support for their patients. They have told me that one of their greatest challenges is recruiting and retaining qualified staff to ensure that patients get the high-quality, effective care they need.

It is clear that our nation is facing a serious shortage of health care professionals, especially in rural areas states like Arkansas. Health care professionals are concerned, as am I, that these shortages will continue to be a problem, as millions more Americans are insured by the new health care law and physicians increasingly turn to specialized care rather than primary care. Other challenges include a lack of faculty to train health professionals and geographic inequities in reimbursement from both public and private payers.

I was proud to help craft and pass *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*, which addresses a number of these challenges. For example, the legislation:

- **Invests in the National Health Service Corps**
Increases funding for the National Health Service Corps, a program that provides scholarships and loan repayment to encourage primary care providers to practice in underserved areas.
- **Reauthorizes and Improves Scholarship and Loan Repayment Programs**
Invests in grants, scholarships, and loan repayment programs in fields such as primary care, dentistry, pediatrics and nursing.
- **Develops Workforce Planning and Analysis**
Establishes a national workforce commission to gather information and better coordinate workforce planning and analysis.
- **Incentivizes Primary Care and Practice in Underserved Areas**
Provides payment bonuses for primary care services in Medicare and Medicaid and for general surgery services provided in a Health Professional Shortage Area.
- **Directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to Establish Standards Simplifying and Standardizing Paperwork**
Allows providers to spend more time doing what they do best – caring for patients – while also saving taxpayers a potential \$20 billion over ten years.

- **Builds upon Recovery Act Bonuses for Early Adoption and Meaningful Use of Health Information Technology**

Helps to improve coordination among providers and make delivery of health care safer, more effective, and more efficient.

I need *your* help to implement and build upon these solutions that will put our nation's health care workforce on a more sustainable path. I'm working to ensure that students and health care professionals take advantage of the grant, scholarship, and loan programs included in this legislation. In particular, let's get our schools and communities involved and educate young people about career options in the health care field. We also need Arkansas and all states to be involved in the workforce commission established by the legislation, so that the unique needs of each state can be addressed.

Arkansas's and our nation's health care providers are to be commended for the work they do each day to save and improve lives. *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* will help make the job easier, and I'm proud to have helped play a role in helping this legislation become a reality.

U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln from Arkansas is a senior member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance.