

Talking Points for the “Midwifery Care Access and Reimbursement Equity Act” of 2009

- The Midwifery Care Access and Reimbursement Equity Act of 2009 (H.R.1101/S.662), as introduced by Rep. Ed Towns (D-NY) and Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI) in the House of Representatives, and by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) in the U.S. Senate, will correct an inequity in the rate of reimbursement for services provided by certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) within the Medicare program. It will also clarify that certified midwives (CMs) are allowed to bill under Medicare for midwifery services.
- Over half of the 50 states reimburse midwives at the same rate as physicians under Medicaid programs, yet a 35% disparity in reimbursement exists within the Medicare program. This disparity is a barrier to women’s access to midwifery services.
- Congress has already spoken on this issue. As part of the Children’s Health and Medicare Protection Act (CHAMP), passed by the House in August 2007, the Congress approved equitable reimbursement for nurse-midwifery services under Medicare. The Congressional Budget Office scored the provision (Section 603) of the CHAMP Act as having no cost. This is due to the fact that midwifery is a relatively small, yet essential benefit for women within the Medicare program. Under the Medicare program, midwives provide obstetrical care for women of childbearing age who are disabled, in addition to well women services to senior women.
- CNMs/CMs are highly qualified health professionals with extensive education and training. They work independently but collaboratively with OB/GYNs and other physicians. CNMs/CMs not only take care of women through pregnancy and childbirth, but also provide primary care, annual exams and cancer screening to women of all ages. Midwives have historically cared for those populations most at risk for health disparities.
- Other providers including optometrists, podiatrists, nurse anesthetists, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, chiropractors, and all physicians receive full (100%) reimbursement under the fee schedule for Medicare services rendered within their scope of practice, as authorized by state law. CNMs currently receive 65% of the Medicare fee schedule. This legislation will remedy this inequity.
- A variety of national organizations have expressed their support for this legislation during the 110th Congress. In addition to several national nursing organizations, the National Rural Health Association, the National Perinatal Association, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists each endorsed the legislation.