

## Legislative Update – NHMA Newsletter – March 2022

Recently Congress passed a long overdue appropriations package that includes increased funding for several important priorities for NHMA. Included in the package are important funding for education programs including \$183 million for Hispanic Serving Institutions, a \$34 million increase from last year. Also included was more funding to combat chronic diseases like cancer, HIV/Aids, heart disease and Alzheimer's disease. There was greater funding for initiatives on mental health and maternity and postpartum care as well as a \$37 million increase for rural health programs. NHMA applauds all lawmakers for getting these important programs funded and congratulates our partners who worked with us to see these increases in funding included in this appropriations package.

NHMA was invited to the White House's launch of the National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, visit [whitehouse.gov/covidplan/](https://whitehouse.gov/covidplan/) more information.

As COVID-19 infection rates have dropped from just a month ago, many states are starting to roll back their mask mandates. While NHMA is cautiously optimistic we know that there are still millions of Americans who are unvaccinated and we need to make sure they have the easiest possible access to life saving vaccines. NHMA signed a letter to the leaders of the committees who handle healthcare issues, calling on them to create a permanent funding for comprehensive health care services provided by pharmacists. Currently they are on temporary government contracts and once the public health emergency is lifted these services will be gone.

NHMA has been a leader in smoking prevention advocacy especially for e-cigarettes/vaping for young adults. With our partners at the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, we signed a letter to congressional leaders calling for synthetic nicotine be regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as all other tobacco products are. We were delighted to see in the recently passed appropriations package included language that enables FDA to regulate synthetic nicotine products as tobacco products. Manufacturers of synthetic nicotine products would have a limited transition period to stay on the market but would then be regulated like other tobacco products. After 120 days, a synthetic nicotine product could remain on the market only if FDA had granted it a marketing order.

Obesity has been an epidemic especially among the Hispanic community for several years and NHMA has been leading the charge to see effective treatment be made more widely available to those suffering with obesity. To that end NHMA partnered with League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to send comments to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to expand Medicare coverage of intensive behavioral therapy for obesity by allowing coverage for therapy that is provided by a physician who is not a primary care physician or other health care providers (e.g., physician assistants and nurse practitioners) and approved counseling programs. We also urged CMS coverage under Medicare's prescription drug benefit of drugs used for the treatment of obesity or for weight loss management for individuals who are overweight.

The opioid epidemic has been ravaging the country for over three decades and NHMA has been working with its partners in Voices for Non-Opioid Choices to see that non-addictive medications and treatments are more widely available to prevent the potential for opioid addiction. We signed onto a letter to the leaders of the Senate Finance, who are working on a mental health package, to include provision from the Non-Opioids Prevent Addiction In the Nation (NOPAIN) Act in their package. This bill temporarily establishes separate payments for certain non-opioid treatments under the Medicare prospective payment system for hospital outpatient department services and the payment system for ambulatory surgical center services. The bill applies to pain management treatments that are able to replace or reduce opioid consumption, as shown through clinical trials or data.