

Healthcare Reform Becomes Law

President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act into law on Tuesday, March 23rd. The U.S. House of Representatives passed this bill by a vote of 219 to 212 on Sunday, March 21. The bill, which was first approved by the Senate on December 24, 2009, was accepted with revisions made in the reconciliation bill that passed by a vote of 220 to 211. The Senate voted on these revisions through the process of budget reconciliation by a vote of 56 to 42 on March 25th and then the bill was sent back to the House for a final vote of 220-207 on March 25th because there were several minor provisions that were deemed not relevant to the budget by the Senate Parliamentarian.

Almost immediate changes to health insurance coverage include (1) children are allowed to stay on their parents insurance policies until age 26, (2) individuals should not be dropped by their insurance plans (rescission of coverage), and (3) by the end of 2010 individuals should be able to find coverage in high risk pools. This legislation will require most Americans have health insurance, adding 16 million people to Medicaid and providing subsidies for low- and middle-income people. As a result, coverage will be expanded to 32 million Americans who are uninsured. Healthcare reform also includes provisions eliminating preexisting condition barriers by 2014/denial of coverage to patients with cancer, and coverage for clinical trials, all of which are important priorities of ONS's health policy efforts. There are provisions in the bill that address shortages in workforce and health promotion and prevention.