



## New Direction Congress Recognizes Upcoming National Public Health Week by Passing Key Public Health Bills

### Key Points:

- Next week, the week of April 6-April 12, the country is celebrating National Public Health Week. National Public Health Week is a time to reflect on the importance of quality public health programs in all of our lives – from effective childhood vaccination programs, to early screening programs for diseases, to ensuring Americans have access to critical treatment programs.
- This week, in recognition of the upcoming Public Health Week, the House considered and passed eight key public health bills. These eight bills had been reported by the Energy and Commerce Committee on March 4. Debate on all eight bills occurred on March 30, and then the votes on the bills occurred on March 30 and March 31. Seven out of these eight bills were passed by the House in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, but failed to clear the Senate.
- These eight public health bills are as follows:
  - **H.R. 1246, Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Act (Rep. Capps)**, to reauthorize through FY 2015 and improve the critical Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program, designed to identify and help infants with hearing loss.
  - **H.R. 756, National Pain Care Policy Act (Rep. Capps)**, to improve pain care, including supporting programs to educate and train medical professionals on pain care.
  - **H.R. 479, the “Wakefield Act” (Rep. Matheson)**, to reauthorize through FY 2014 and improve the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program, which is designed to improve emergency services for children needing trauma or critical care.
  - **H.R. 577, Vision Care for Kids (Rep. Gene Green)**, to create a grant program to provide comprehensive eye exams for uninsured children with vision disorders.
  - **H.R. 20, Health, Education, Research, and Support for Postpartum Depression (Rep. Rush)**, to expand research on postpartum depression, call for a national campaign to increase awareness of postpartum depression, and ensure services for those with postpartum depression.
  - **H.R. 1259, Dextromethorphan Distribution Act (“Cough Syrup” Bill) (Rep. Upton)**, to crack down on the bulk sale of dextromethorphan (DXM), an ingredient of cough syrup that kids are abusing to get high.
  - **H.R. 1253, Health Insurance Restrictions and Limitations Clarification Act (Rep. Burgess)**, to add conditions that group health plan providers must meet in order to limit or restrict coverage, including ensuring limitations and restrictions are explicit and clear.
  - **H.Con.Res. 60, Observance of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month (Rep. Granger)**, to support the observance of this month in March as a means to educate the public on the importance of early detection and screening for colorectal cancer.

This week, to mark the upcoming National Public Health Week, the House considered and passed eight public health bills under suspension of the rules. These eight bills were reported by the Energy and Commerce Committee on March 4. Following is an overview of these eight bills.

- **H.R. 1246, Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Act (Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA)).** The Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program is a critical Centers for Disease Control program intended to identify and help infants with hearing loss. This bill reauthorizes the program through FY 2015 and expands it to provide screening and intervention services for young children (the program is currently limited to newborns and infants). Early detection of hearing problems is critical to developing and implementing an effective treatment program for children who experience hearing loss. When EHDI was first authorized in 1999, only 3 percent of all babies were being screened for hearing loss at birth; today, 93 percent of babies are screened within one month of birth. *The House passed the bill by voice vote on March 30.*
- **H.R. 756, National Pain Care Policy Act (Rep. Lois Capps, D-CA).** This bill authorizes HHS to contract with the Institute of Medicine to convene a national conference on pain and to support programs to educate and train medical professionals on pain care. It also expands the Public Health Service Act to encourage the National Institutes of Health to develop pain research initiatives. Finally, it authorizes HHS to award grants for the implementation of programs to provide education and training in pain care. *The House passed the bill by voice vote on March 30.*
- **H.R. 479, Wakefield Act (Emergency Medical Services for Children) (Rep. Jim Matheson – (D-UT)).** This bill reauthorizes through FY 2014 and makes improvements in the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program, which is designed to improve emergency medical services for children needing trauma or critical care. For example, it extends the length of time for which a grant may be awarded to four years, from three. There are over 30 million child and teen visits annually to our nation’s emergency rooms. And yet many emergency services are still designed for adults. Since the EMSC program was created 20 years ago, major improvements in emergency care for children have been realized. Injury-related deaths have dropped by 40 percent over that period of time. *The House passed the bill by a vote of 390-6 on March 30.*
- **H.R. 577, Vision Care for Kids Act (Rep. Gene Green (D-TX)).** This bill creates a grant program to provide comprehensive eye exams for uninsured children with vision disorders, as well as vision correction services. It authorizes \$10 million in FY 2010, \$13 million in FY 2011, and \$14 million per year in FY 2012 through FY 2014. States would also be required to make a 25% matching contribution. *The House passed the bill by a vote of 404-17 on March 31.*
- **H.R. 20, Melanie Blocker Stokes Mom’s Opportunity to Access Health, Education, Research, and Support for Postpartum Depression Act (Rep. Bobby Rush, D-IL).** This bill encourages HHS and the National Institutes of Health to expand and intensify research on postpartum depression and to conduct and support research in an effort to find a cure for postpartum depression and psychosis. It also encourages NIH to carry out a national campaign to increase awareness of postpartum depression. Finally, it directs HHS to make grants to help with coordinating the effective delivery of essential services to individuals with postpartum depression. *The House passed the bill by a vote of 391-8 on March 30.*
- **H.R. 1259, Dextromethorphan Distribution Act (“Cough Syrup” Bill) (Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI)).** This bill cracks down on the bulk sale of dextromethorphan (DXM), an ingredient of cough syrup that kids are abusing to get high. Specifically, the bill helps prevent abuse of the drug by making it illegal to distribute unfinished DXM to a person or company not previously registered

with the FDA or approved under federal or state law. Studies have shown that teenagers are obtaining unfinished DXM to get high by consuming large amounts of the powder or mixing it with alcohol, and research indicates that abuse of DXM by teenagers has increased sharply in recent years. **The House passed the bill by a vote of 407-8 on March 31.**

- **H.R. 1253, Health Insurance Restrictions and Limitations Clarification Act (Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX)).** This bill adds conditions that group health plan providers must meet in order to limit or restrict coverage for beneficiaries, including ensuring that limitations and restrictions are explicit and clear; disclosing limitations and restrictions to the plan sponsor (employers) in writing in advance of the point of sale; and providing limitations and restrictions to participants and beneficiaries in formats that are easily understandable before enrollment. **The House passed the bill by a vote of 422-3 on March 31.**
- **H.Con.Res. 60, Supporting the Observance of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month (Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX)).** This resolution supports the observance of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in March as a means to educate the public on the importance of early detection. It also commends national and community organizations for promoting colorectal cancer awareness and urges health care providers to earn a “Blue Star,” an award provided by several colon cancer advocacy groups in recognition of their contribution to the collective effort to combat colon cancer. **The House passed the resolution by voice vote on March 30.**

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April 2, 2009