

Washington, DC - The National Health Law Program (NHeLP) welcomed the introduction of the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2012 (S. 2474) (HEAA) in the U.S. Senate yesterday. The HEAA, introduced by Sen. Daniel Akaka and co-sponsored by Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, complements the Affordable Care Act and the health equity efforts currently being implemented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"The HEAA is a comprehensive strategy for eliminating health and health care disparities in minority and underserved populations by addressing the multiple barriers these communities face," said Emily Spitzer, NHeLP executive director. "The Act reflects NHeLP's commitment to ensuring that all persons have access to quality health care that meets their needs."

Yesterday's bill serves as the Senate version of the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2011, introduced last year by Rep. Barbara Lee, along with Reps. Donna Christensen and Lucille Roybal-Allard and the Congressional Tri-Caucus - Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Health and health care disparities in racial and ethnic minorities and other underserved communities are well documented and caused by a number of factors, including high health care and insurance costs, difficulties accessing linguistically and culturally competent care and access to providers. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) took a significant step toward addressing many of these disparities by establishing a foundation for disparities elimination, expanding access to affordable health care and eliminating unfair insurance company practices.

The HEAA builds on the strengths of the ACA and provides additional avenues for disparities elimination. The HEAA works to eliminate existing access barriers to affordable health insurance coverage, promotes investments in innovative health delivery methods and technologies, and advances research and data collection about the health needs and outcomes of our communities. In addition, the bill ensures that a full range of culturally and linguistically appropriate health care and public health services are available and accessible in every community, creates a pipeline and new training opportunities for minority-serving professional and allied health care workers, and incorporates strategies to address a range of disease-specific, mental and behavioral health issues facing minority communities.

NHeLP served on the Steering Committee for the Health Equity and Accountability Act

Community Working Group, a coalition of diverse stakeholders which worked with Congressional leaders to craft the bill.

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