

The American Public Health Association (APHA) adopted 19 new policies addressing a broad range of public health issues during its 133rd Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA in December, 2005. Among these policies were two which NHeLP staff helped to draft.

One of these addressed patient's ability to have contraceptive prescriptions filled at pharmacies. This was passed to address the small, but growing number of pharmacies and pharmacists that refuse to fill prescriptions for contraceptives, including emergency contraception, based on personal beliefs. The policy recognizes pharmacists' professional responsibilities to evaluate prescriptions for contraindications and also notes that the vast majority of pharmacists have no objection to dispensing contraception and the proactive role that pharmacists have had in making emergency contraception more available.

However, the policy proposes a number of strategies to address situations where patients are being denied access to contraceptives in a timely manner. These strategies include urging pharmacies to stock contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives; urging pharmacy boards to promulgate and enforce policies placing the burden of responsibility on pharmacies to ensure that contraceptive prescriptions are filled in a customary time frame, while accommodating individual pharmacists with objections as long as those accommodation do not impose an undue burden on the employer; and supporting educational programs for pharmacists about the dispensing of contraception and emergency contraception. The policy also continues to urge the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to make emergency contraception available over-the-counter.

NHeLP staff participated in a work group of reproductive rights advocates and health professionals, including those representing pharmacists, to draft this policy.

Another adopted policy addressed the needs of immigrants following the Gulf Coast hurricanes. The policy calls upon Congress and federal and state agencies to provide resources allowing for specific, targeted outreach to affected immigrant communities in the Gulf Coast, to ensure that immigrant hurricane victims have immediate access to such benefits as Medicaid and food stamps, to ensure continuity of refugee services and to provide automatic extension of lawful status for people with non-immigrant visas.

The policy also calls upon Congress and states to maintain and expand their commitment to adequate funding of public programs such as Medicaid, nutrition, housing, education, and other programs that are necessary to address the overwhelming health, economic and social disparities in our society. This policy was authored by NHeLP staff with significant assistance from the National Immigration Law Center and members of the APHA Latino Caucus.

Other policies address issues such as protecting children from lead exposure, addressing unmet end-of-life needs, sexuality education in schools, and support for oral health programs. The text of these and all of APHA policies can be found at www.apha.org.

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