The Amputee Coalition of America’s (ACA) efforts to implement its Action Plan for People with Limb Loss (APPLL) continue to gain momentum. Coordinating with local groups and individuals, the ACA is working to improve prosthetic access for all amputees in the U.S., at both state and federal levels.

At the beginning of January, key staff met to finalize a campaign targeting five state legislatures for the passage of parity bills in 2006. The ACA is working to provide practitioners and activists with the necessary guidance, materials and support to help facilitate their organizing, fundraising and communications efforts.

Over the next two years, we will continue to monitor state activity and provide assistance in up to 11 other key states. The goal is to pass parity legislation in these states by 2007 or 2008. As the campaign grows, we plan to hire additional staff to help meet fundraising and program goals. We will also offer “on the ground” staff support at the state level during key periods in the campaign.

We are already seeing a great deal of momentum coming out of our increased efforts. In February, the Iowa Senate Commerce Committee held a hearing on the proposed bill SSB 1281, a study bill requiring healthcare benefits for prosthetic devices. Attendance was high, even in the face of the challenging weather outside.

Following the hearing, a Subcommittee was assigned. Only two weeks later, SSB 1281 passed through Committee on a unanimous voice vote. The bill has been assigned a Senate number: S.F. 2367. We hope to see the bill on the Senate floor this session.

But Iowa is just one of the many places where parity is moving forward. Activists in California, New York, Massachusetts, Ohio and Kentucky have been working hard for many months to advance parity.

The Ohio group is distributing a patient education brochure to facilities all across the state. They have also identified a potential sponsor for the bill and are working to draft a bill. Kentucky has also pulled together a strong group of patients and practitioners. They are working to finalize the bill. Pennsylvania is another state where we expect to see a bill introduced in the coming months. The ACA is working with a local representative to organize a strong grassroots effort to support this legislation.

Other states have experienced setbacks, with parity bills getting held up in Committee. New Jersey’s A2774 got stuck in Committee last session. It looks as if that may be the same fate for their latest parity bill.

The New Jersey Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee heard A1011 in January. The Chairperson, Assemblyman Neil Cohen, said that the fiscal impact of the bill appeared to be “nominal” and that there was no reason to keep it from moving forward. The only opposition filed was by the Chamber of Commerce. The bill, however, has still not moved forward. Connecticut has experienced similar difficulty getting their bill up for a floor vote.

But the momentum continues as states like Tennessee, Texas and Florida prepare to launch bills in 2007. The ACA met in March with a lobbyist and practitioner interested in state parity in Tennessee. Texas has an active group that has been meeting for almost a year to prepare for the launch of their bill.
In late February, the ACA worked with the Florida Association of Orthotists & Prosthetists (FAOP) on the first of many strategy meetings for their parity effort.

The same group held an exhibition at the state Capitol the next day to reach out to legislators and their staff to raise awareness about the needs of amputees. ACA and FAOP were joined by a wide range of partners, including Hanger, Ossur, Otto Bock, and Shriners Children’s Hospital. Regas Woods, a native Floridian and a bilateral above-knee amputee and record-holder in track & field, also attended.

Like Florida, many states are concentrating this session on updating or, in some cases introducing for the first time, legislation related to licensure to enhance and promote quality patient care. These efforts will allow activists to open up a conversation about the standard of care that each patient should be able to not only expect, but afford.

As we continue to work for parity, it is crucial that we have the support of our members, industry partners and other groups interested in ensuring that people with limb loss get the care they need. There will be many opportunities to get involved throughout the campaign. Whether it is through writing a letter to a local paper to raise awareness about the need for parity or calling legislators to urge them to vote for a state bill, we will need our supporters to get active and stay involved throughout the campaign if we are to be successful.

The ACA is looking forward to an exciting year ahead!

For the most up-to-date information about the status of each bill, please visit the “Advocacy: State Parity” page of our Web site: www.amputee-coalition.org/aca_advocacy_stateparity.html

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Note: No funding from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) is used to support ACA advocacy efforts. The views represented in this article do not necessarily represent the views of the CDC.

New Legislation Doesn’t HELP Close Insurance Gaps

by Morgan Sheets,
National Campaign Director for APPLL

When the sponsors of the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act of 2005 (S. 1955) introduced the bill last November, they claimed that it would expand healthcare access. The sponsors have continued to make these claims as the bill has moved into the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

The legislation would allow small businesses to group together when designing health insurance plans. Unfortunately, it would also allow companies to get around state coverage mandates, including a requirement for prosthetic parity.

In return for premiums paid for group health insurance, consumers expect to be covered for catastrophic illness or injury. Sadly, without regulation to ensure coverage, many people are left without the care that they need. That puts benefits like prostheses on the chopping block. A bill like S. 1955, which would usurp benefit requirements, is a dangerous attack on quality coverage.

And parity isn’t the only issue at risk here. Many additional insurance benefit requirements would be impacted by this bill. Cancer screenings, diabetes supplies, and rehabilitation are just some of the other vital benefits that would suffer.

In addition, S. 1955 would allow insurers to bypass state laws on premium limitations based on categories such as health status, age and gender. This means that state laws aimed at making healthcare more affordable for specific groups such as seniors or people with disabilities — those with ongoing health needs — would be overridden.

The Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act asks only that an insurer offer an alternate plan on par with a plan that is offered to state employees in order to bypass state requirements. This also allows the insurer to choose a high deductible plan. Higher deductibles require individuals and families to pay even more out of pocket before expenses will be covered.

This proposal, which claims to provide more affordable and expanded coverage, not only fails at that task but could also make existing access and coverage problems even worse. This destructive legislation could eliminate the enforcement of state parity requirements not just in the small group markets that are the focus of this bill, but also in the individual and large group markets. It is because of this component that many advocacy organizations are opposing S. 1955. It would foil years of efforts at the state level to ensure that patients have the health coverage they need.

Note: The Senate HELP Committee met in March. They passed the bill by a vote of 11-9. The Senate is now preparing to vote on S. 1955. The Amputee Coalition of America urges its members to contact their senators to oppose this bill. We will keep our members advised on the status of this legislation.

For the most up-to-date information about the status of each bill, please visit the “Advocacy: State Parity” page of our Web site: www.amputee-coalition.org/aca_advocacy_stateparity.html

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