Advocates Applaud Congress and President for Funding

Much Needed Improvements in Nursing Home Staffing Information

Washington, DC, October 6, 2014 – The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice), the Coalition of Geriatric Nursing Organizations, and Altarum Institute's Center for Elder Care and Advanced Illness applaud Congressional leaders for the inclusion of $11 million in the *Improving Medicare Post-Acute Care Transformation (IMPACT) Act of 2014* - post-acute care reform legislation signed into law today - to fund the development of a system for collection of nursing home staffing levels through verifiable payroll data.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) were required under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to implement this system by March 2012. Although the funding comes more than two years after scheduled implementation of the reporting provision, advocates expect that CMS will now make rapid implementation of a new payroll-based staffing system a top priority.

Accurate staffing data are essential for many reasons. Because research shows there is a strong relationship between staffing in nursing homes and quality of care, consumers and their families need real-time, reliable information about the number and type of staff in order to make informed decisions when choosing a nursing home. Regrettably, reliable data about levels of staff such as nurses and nursing assistants are not available. The nurse staffing ratios that are posted on CMS's Nursing Home Compare Website and used in the agency's Five Star rating system are increasingly acknowledged as inadequate and inaccurate. These data are self-reported by facilities once a year, based on a two-week period prior to a nursing home's annual inspection and are not subject to being audited. As a result, consumers and family members select facilities using flawed and sometimes misleading information, which can affect the quality and safety of resident care. Accurate staffing data are also vitally important for policymakers, health care professionals, nursing home providers, and researchers who are dedicated to improving the quality of services.

Passage of the IMPACT Act with its funding for creating a payroll-based data collection system is a victory for all those committed to improving the lives of millions of Americans receiving services and living in nursing homes. Advocates commend Congress for its decisive action, as well as President Obama for signing the bill into law, and now call on CMS to operationalize this system without further delay.

About the Consumer Voice

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care was formed as the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform in 1975 because of public concern about substandard care in nursing homes. Today, the Consumer Voice is the leading national voice representing consumers on issues related to long-term care, helping to ensure that consumers are empowered to advocate for themselves.