

Health care for Americans Abroad?

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President Obama has committed to overhaul health care this year and in the face of mounting opposition, has taken his arguments to the country in a series of recent speeches. Although his objectives--extending coverage while cutting excessive costs--may appear contradictory, he persists in asserting that the US can have a better, fairer health system at a price that will deliver improved services at a lower cost.

One potential aspect of the overhaul concerns Americans abroad who are eligible Medicare beneficiaries. During Overseas Americans Week, AARO joined its coalition partners and Americans for Medicare in Mexico (AMMAC), an association of US citizens resident in Mexico, in its effort to persuade Congress to adopt a Demonstration Project to test whether US Medicare standards of medical practice and hospitalization can be delivered in Mexico to eligible Medicare beneficiaries at a significant saving to the Medicare program, while maintaining proper reporting criteria and assuring quality control and avoidance of fraud and abuse. A pilot project in Mexico, which counts at least 700,000 American residents of which many are retirees, requires Congressional legislation both to authorize the test and to finance its costs. On the issue of comparative costs, it has been estimated, using data compiled by the Kaiser Foundation, that US medical costs are, on average, three times those of Mexico for results that do not statistically justify the added expenditure.

Health care Bills are currently in preparation both in the House and Senate and Congressional leaders have indicated a desire to have legislation before each chamber by their summer recess. Whether the Demonstration Project will be inserted in pending legislation by that date is unknown today, but strenuous efforts were marshaled during the week of June 8 by Paul Crist of AMMAC to convince key Congressmen and Senators, including Majority Leader Reid, to back the initiative. Prominent in showing interest in this proposal were Representatives Becerra (D-CA), Honda (D-CA), McDermott (D-WA), Maloney (D-NY), Baldwin (D-WI), Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL), Frank (D-MAS) and Senators Mikulski (D-MD) as well as Reid. Whether or not the proposal makes its way into the final Bill, AARO will want your support for the passage of this important improvement in Medicare policy as part of its campaign to endorse the change. We will keep you informed of progress on this exciting development.