



For Immediate Release
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Putting Consumers Back in Control

NCOA survey of Americans with chronic conditions points to need for cost-effective self-management programs and support as part of comprehensive health reform

WASHINGTON, DC – Health leaders and policy experts joined the non-profit National Council on Aging (NCOA) on Capitol Hill today for a briefing on the state of chronic care in America and how health reform can improve a bleak and broken system for millions of Americans suffering from a variety of chronic conditions.

“Chronic disease accounts for more than 75 percent of the nation’s \$2 trillion medical care costs. In order to truly help direct health reform efforts, NCOA listened to those most affected to get a better understanding of their challenges and what they need to better manage their health,” said Nancy Whitelaw, Senior Vice President, Center for Healthy Aging with NCOA.

At the briefing, Whitelaw and others discussed the results of NCOA’s *Re-Forming Health Care: Americans Speak Out about Chronic Conditions and the Pursuit of Healthier Lives* survey. Conducted by Lake Research Partners, this study of 1,000 Americans 44 and older with conditions like heart disease, arthritis, hypertension, and diabetes paints a challenging picture of this vulnerable population and a health care system that is not meeting its needs.

The briefing participants identified community-based programs for people with chronic conditions as a practical solution for improving quality of life and reducing health care utilization. Kate Lorig, RN, DrPH, director of the Stanford Patient Education Research Center at Stanford University, described aspects of the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program or CDSMP, which has demonstrated impressive health benefits in states and communities around the country. Lisa Alecxih, vice president of The Lewin Group noted significant cost-savings derived from the CDSMP and other evidence-based health promotion programs that are delivered in non-clinical, community settings.

Key Findings

Much of the briefing centered on the *Re-Forming Health Care* survey, which found that:

- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of those surveyed have two or more chronic conditions – and 20 percent have four or more chronic conditions.
- Alarmingly, one in four (25 percent of) survey respondents have delayed health care or not filled much-needed prescriptions for financial reasons in the past year, despite the fact that 71 percent are frequently or sometimes living in pain, 65 percent are experiencing significant stress, and 50 percent report being depressed.

While most survey respondents say they rely on the health care system for ongoing help, many feel as if they are not getting the support they need:

- More than half (57 percent) of Americans surveyed say their health care providers have not asked whether they have help to manage their problems
- 45 percent say that they rarely or never receive referrals to resources such as classes, counselors, dieticians and health educators.
- Over one-third (38 percent) say they don't have the money it takes to do things that will improve their health, and this percent is much higher among Latinos (63 percent), African Americans (58 percent), people with annual household incomes below \$20,000 (65 percent), and people with four or more chronic conditions (59 percent).

Informing the Health Care Reform Discussion

With chronic conditions as the central challenge to American health care today, NCOA is seeking to identify gaps in appropriate chronic care, including self-care, to inform the national conversation about health care reform.

“Given what the survey participants told us,” said NCOA’s Whitelaw, “we identified three areas of focus necessary for re-forming the health care system in order to support Americans with chronic conditions.”

The NCOA characterizes the following three areas of focus as:

- **Policy:** The federal government needs to make investments in community-based programs, and in primary care and hospital settings to ensure team-based, coordinated care across all settings.
- **Practice:** Health care professionals have a responsibility to connect their patients to effective community self-care programs, as well as improve the quality and coordination of care to people with chronic conditions.
- **Personal Skills:** Americans with chronic conditions need to develop the skills and confidence to manage their health and to advocate for the help and support they need.

Community Programs Are Critical

According to NCOA, a key element for health care reform around chronic care resides in community-based programs that focus on self care. This includes teaching problem-solving, decision-making and communication skills needed by people with chronic conditions to manage their own health outside of the clinical setting.

“It is important for Americans with chronic conditions, especially older adults, to seek support for programs to better manage their health,” said Stanford’s Dr. Lorig. “Community-based self-care programs can be cost-effective and can help people build the confidence and skills they need to re-take control of their lives.”

Evidence-based health programs can result in significant improvements in energy, health status, social activities, less fatigue and lower use of the hospital and/or emergency room. NCOA provides technical assistance for a variety of evidence-based programs throughout the United States including *Stanford’s Chronic Disease Self-Management Program* and *Diabetes Self-Management Training, Enhance Fitness, Matter of Balance, and Healthy IDEAS*. For more information, please visit www.healthyagingprograms.org.

About NCOA

The National Council on Aging is a non-profit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCOA is a national voice for older Americans - especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged - and the community organizations that serve them. It brings together non-profit organizations, businesses and government to develop creative solutions that improve the lives of all older adults. NCOA works with thousands of organizations across the country to help seniors find jobs and benefits improve their health, live independently and remain active in their communities. For more information, visit www.ncoa.org.

About the Survey

Lake Research Partners conducted the survey via telephone January 5 - 30, 2009, among 1,109 Americans age 44 and older nationwide, who have at least one chronic condition. The margin of sampling error for the total results is ± 2.9 percentage points. For additional details about the national survey, please visit www.ncoa.org/healthierlives.

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