



Association of Academic Health Centers
Leading institutions that serve society

For Immediate Release

March 12, 2009

News Release

Contact: Elaine Rubin (202) 265-9600

Health Reform Must Include Health Workforce, AAHC President Tells Congress *Health system reform will not succeed without coordinated national health workforce planning*

WASHINGTON, March 12 - Health system reform cannot be successful without simultaneously changing how the nation develops and implements health workforce policy, Dr. Steven A. Wartman, president and CEO of the Association of Academic Health Centers (AAHC), told the Senate Finance Committee today at a hearing on *Workforce Issues in Health Care Reform: Assessing the Present and Preparing for the Future*. Wartman urged policymakers to "incorporate a new, integrated, and coordinated approach to national workforce policy as health system reform is considered."

Wartman presented the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of AAHC's groundbreaking report, *Out of Order, Out of Time: The State of the Nation's Health Workforce*, noting the critical relationship of workforce issues to any reform proposals. Wartman called attention to many aspects of current health workforce policy that are "out of order," including inadequate access to primary care and shortages in many health professions, and detailed why the nation is running "out of time" to change course.

Wartman argued that current problems are an outgrowth of a systemic flaw in our nation's century-old approach to health workforce policymaking that leaves responsibility for planning and managing the nation's health workforce fragmented among hundreds of federal, state, and private stakeholders that rarely coordinate their policies or activities.

Warning that health system reform "will add further stress to the already daunting health workforce challenges," Wartman recommended the immediate appointment of a national health workforce coordinator to begin mobilizing current resources more effectively as an interim step. "This should be followed by the creation of a permanent national health workforce planning body to address health workforce needs in a comprehensive, coordinated, and strategic manner," he added. The planning body, said Wartman, will for example:

- Harmonize public and private standards, requirements, and prevailing practices across jurisdictions;
- Address access to health professions education and the ability of educational institutions to respond to economic, social, and environmental factors that impact the workforce; and
- Identify unintended adverse interactions among public and private policies, standards, and requirements.

"My concern is that we will press forward with health reform *without* full consideration for the health professional workforce that will be needed to make these reforms successful," concluded Wartman.

The AAHC, representing more than 100 academic health centers nationwide, is a national non-profit association dedicated to advancing the nation's health and well-being through the vigorous leadership of academic health centers. Testimony and information on the workforce is available at: www.aahcdc.org.

#