



Association of Academic Health Centers
Leading institutions that serve society

Public Policy Agenda

Approved by the AAHC Board of Directors, January 2007

Introduction

The Public Policy Agenda of the Association of Academic Health Centers (AAHC) addresses the challenges of a new economic and political era. Despite being at the forefront of patient care, medical research, health professions education, and economic growth and development, the academic health center enterprise is challenged by multiple external forces, including growing societal expectations and demands, an ever-changing health care environment, political realities, economic constraints, increased public scrutiny, workforce shortages, ongoing demands for public accountability, and concerns about competitiveness in the global market. During this era of devolution of authority to the states, the roles and responsibilities of the federal government continue to evolve as policymakers also seek to shift many governmental responsibilities to the private sector — often with major and unintended consequences for academic health centers. Additionally, a changing political environment and uncertainty with regard to direction on health care further complicate the academic health center position vis-à-vis policymaking.

There is growing concern within the academic health center community that policymakers do not understand, or perceive as urgent, traditional academic health center messages about their missions of health professions education, biomedical research, and health care delivery for the nation.

The complexity of the academic health center and the interrelationships and integration of its mission areas are not readily perceived or easily communicated to those outside of these institutions. As a consequence, policy measures often address components and specific functions within the academic health center with no attention to the impact on the sustainability of the entire enterprise.

Today's economic and political environments require new approaches to improve policymaking that impacts the academic health center enterprise. With a new view of academic health centers as agents of change, policymakers can draw on the expertise that academic health centers offer the nation and work with academic health center leaders to resolve critical national health problems.

Understandably, academic health center leaders must focus on their own institutions, often responding to day-to-day issues or emergent crises. Today, perhaps more than ever before, academic health centers collectively must take center stage, and be promoted with ideas that energize and convince all stakeholders to pursue an agenda that merges academic health center goals with those of the nation.

Rationale

The public policy agenda of the Association of Academic Health Centers provides the framework for the association's advocacy, which is helping to shape decisions affecting the nation's health, science, higher education and economic infrastructure by positioning the association as a vital voice on these issues. The AAHC leads by educating policymakers, opinion leaders, and the public about the value and contributions of the academic health center enterprise to the nation.

Academic health centers are leading institutions that serve society and are agents of change within the nation's health and higher education systems.

The following principles not only demonstrate the value of academic health centers to the nation, but also the collective expertise and capabilities academic health centers contribute to finding solutions and resolving critical national problems.

- ***Academic health centers are vital to the national interest.***
The academic health center enterprise represents one of the nation's major assets and, like any asset, requires investment to maintain its high level of performance — performance upon which the nation's health and well-being and economic growth depend.

The academic health center enterprise spans the nation and comprises a large array of public and private institutions with the core societal missions of education, research, and patient care. There is no other American institution that is as multifaceted and intimately connected to individuals, communities, and the health care and other sectors of the nation's economy. Academic health centers foster the complex integration of function and structure by producing the next generation of health professionals, serving as the leading edge in medical research and discovery, and providing the most advanced, high quality patient care.

- ***Academic health centers are engines of the 21st century knowledge economy.***
The key to the academic health center's responsibility to society is the quest for new knowledge and a passion for discovery and science aimed at improving and advancing the human condition.

Academic health centers are the cornerstone of health professions education and the core of the nation's biomedical research enterprise. They are leaders in innovation and creativity, setting new directions in teaching and learning with environments that are thoroughly integrated with research, patient care, and technology. They have the intellectual capital and creative potential to transform society in the 21st century.

- ***Academic health centers are leaders in research and technology.***

Academic health centers are leading research institutions in both the basic and clinical sciences. Pioneering new advances in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and injury, academic health centers enhance America's international preeminence in science.

- ***Academic health centers are the essential core of the health system.***
Academic health centers provide the most advanced patient care, often serving as regional resources for trauma, burns and other special services, promote the quality and effectiveness of patient care through research, and serve as vital health safety nets for their communities.
- ***Academic health centers invest in people.***
Academic health centers invest in people and society, providing jobs, attracting business, educating future generations, and fostering a climate for community renewal and growth, all while changing the shape of regional and national economies. They are deeply committed to engagement and involvement with their local communities.
- ***Academic health centers promote the integration of ideas and services across multiple sectors of the economy.***
Academic health centers cross the boundaries of disciplines, professions, and institutions to foster innovation, to create new knowledge, to respond to public demands, and to seek solutions to societal problems.
- ***Academic health centers foster collaboration with the public and private sectors.***
Historically, both the public and private sectors have played major roles in working with the various components of the academic health center enterprise. These trends are increasingly evident as all parties realize the enormous benefits of partnerships as mutually beneficial, accelerating progress, and contributing to the economy and the public good.

The AAHC Agenda

Goals

Our goals are to:

- 1) Strengthen the voice of the academic health center enterprise in government as well as in the public and private sectors;
- 2) Increase attention to academic health centers as leaders of change with the expertise and willingness to take a principal role in finding solutions to critical national health issues;

- 3) Advance the academic health center enterprise as an engine of the 21st century knowledge economy and as a critical pillar of the nation's infrastructure in health, science, and higher education;
- 4) Promote collaboration and new initiatives among academic health centers to provide examples of quality and high performance in all aspects of patient care, biomedical research, and health professions education;
- 5) Educate and work with policymakers to contribute academic health center expertise in reshaping the domestic policy agenda;
- 6) Promote informed debate on issues concerning the nation's health and well-being; and,
- 7) Enhance the nation's investment in the academic health center enterprise and the supporting infrastructure so vital to the nation's health and economic well-being.

Approaches

Mobilize the strengths and resources of the enterprise

The AAHC policy agenda will highlight strategies and tactics that mobilize the strengths and resources of AAHC member institutions to meet the challenges of this new era. This includes consideration of the broad policy landscape, including decision makers and issues that may not be health related — from taxes to defense — and non-traditional allies who can influence the dynamics of policy debates that affect the academic health center enterprise.

Lead with a new brand of personal diplomacy

To effectively communicate the complexity of the academic health center enterprise requires expertise as well as a brand of personal diplomacy in which academic health center leaders excel. Academic health center leaders have a great deal to contribute to the development of sound public policy; it is important that policymakers and the general public benefit on a national level from their expert input to the decision-making process.

Strategies and Tactics

Educate and inform policymakers and other decision makers.

To reshape the domestic policy agenda on issues that impact the nation's infrastructure in health, higher education, and research, the AAHC will:

- Advocate for increased investment in infrastructure that sustains knowledge enhancement and the national interest;

- Promote the academic health center enterprise as a critical pillar of the U.S. economy, security, and global preeminence;
- Target biomedical research, science policy, health workforce, and health care reform issues;
- Advocate for interagency and intergovernmental collaboration in decision making and policy;
- Analyze policy and become a national resource for research and analysis;
- Identify and address emerging issues that impact the academic health center enterprise; and,
- Gain recognition as a forum for the debate of critical national issues.

Mobilize academic health center CEOs.

To engage in effective dialogue to educate the legislative and executive branches of government and represent the interests of the academic health center enterprise, the AAHC will:

- Look across the nation's academic health centers to support issues and policies that enhance the entire enterprise;
- Develop educational programs that create new vehicles to promote personal involvement of the CEOs of academic health centers (the designated representatives to the AAHC), such as:

Expand and Enhance Communications

To expand the AAHC communications network and provide leadership for collaboration to engage academic health center constituencies and raise the association's profile in Washington, the AAHC will:

- Inform and communicate with AAHC membership and its executive leadership groups; and,
- Maintain, enhance and develop current coalitions and develop new strategic collaborations and relationships.

Initial Priority Areas

Research and Science

- Develop and strengthen the nation's science agenda to ensure international preeminence and reinforce the nation's research infrastructure, with a focus on:

- Harmonizing and rationalizing the regulatory environment;
- Protecting intellectual property; and,
- Preserving and sustaining the research infrastructure, particularly during disasters.

Health Professions Workforce

- Workforce planning
 - Advocate for a national approach;
 - Develop and redesign workforce legislation;
 - Promote movement toward uniform state standards in licensure for all the professions; and,
 - Promote coordinated state and federal planning with academic health center leadership.

Health Care Reform

- Support universal access and advocate for the approach of AAHC members.