

(Pennington, NJ) – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) today joined faculty and students at The College of New Jersey and leadership and members of AARP to highlight how the health reform bill expands nursing capacity and nursing education, while strengthening primary care.

“Strengthening primary care and addressing the nursing shortage are two more ways the reform law will improve the care that all Americans receive,” Holt said. “By tackling these issues, more patients can receive coordinated care and have better access to health care.”

The reform package encourages more nurses and physicians to enter primary care by providing an extra 10 percent bonus in Medicare. Health reform also raises payments for primary care practitioners who treat patients in Medicaid, the government’s health care program for low-income people. Additionally, the law encourages changes in how patients are treated by creating “accountable care organizations,” which will be paid according to how well the patient fares, rather than the number of services provided. This means, for example, issues that can be handled over the phone sometimes will be, and patients won’t be required to come in for an office visit just to ensure the physician gets paid.

The health reform law addresses the nursing shortage by providing incentives for students to enter nursing school. The law improves the nursing student loan program, provides grants to nursing schools to promote nursing career advancement, and offers loan repayment for students who agree to serve as nursing faculty.

Nursing schools are trying to educate greater numbers of students to alleviate the nursing shortage, but cannot expand fast enough. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, schools turned away nearly 50,000 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2008.

In addition to providing incentives for students to enter nursing school, the law also expands federal support for graduate nursing education by creating a Medicare demonstration project where advanced practice nurses are trained to provide primary care, manage chronic diseases, and help patients transition from the hospital to home.

Officials from AARP and TCNJ also talked about the nursing and preventive care benefits of the reform law.

"AARP New Jersey commends the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act which will result in the education of greater numbers of advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs)," said Jim Dieterle, AARP New Jersey Senior State Director. "The law creates a vital program to educate more APRNs to provide primary care, preventive care and chronic care management which is vital to consumers of all ages and is especially important for Medicare beneficiaries. Our thanks to Congressman Holt for helping to highlight this much-needed nursing program."

"This legislation will have a significant and positive impact on nursing schools, our students, practicing nurses, and ultimately the health and health care of Americans," said Susan Bakewell-Sachs, Dean of the School of Nursing, Health, and Exercise Science at The College of New Jersey and Program Director, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Jersey Nursing Initiative at the NJ Chamber of Commerce. "We are grateful to Representative Holt for his continued advocacy and support for nursing education."