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## **Alliance Praises Reps. Walz, Shays for Advancing Debate, Opposition to Medicare-Funded Nursing Home Care**

*Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care: Bipartisan Letter to House Leadership Opposing Medicare Cuts Successfully Elevates Profile of Key Health Policy Issue*

**Washington, DC** – The Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care today praised U.S. Reps. Tim Walz (D-MN) and Chris Shays (R-CT) for working quickly and effectively to rally bipartisan opposition in the House of Representatives to possible cuts to Medicare-financed nursing home care, and said their joint letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) strongly opposing the funding cuts is advancing a key health care policy debate. Forty U.S. House members, in addition to Reps. Walz and Shays, have signed the letter.

“Within a short period of time, Congressmen Walz and Shays organized a successful bipartisan effort to ensure the House leadership is fully cognizant of the fact Medicare cuts like those still under consideration would strike directly at facilities’ front line caregiver staff and their collective capacity to delivery care,” warned Alan G. Rosenbloom, President of the Alliance. “Quality outcomes are largely contingent upon having the Medicare resources, now threatened, to invest in infrastructure, particularly staffing - - adding staff to meet changing patient needs, and providing more robust staff training and retention programs. Cutting Medicare funding to skilled nursing facilities would be entirely inconsistent with the objectives shared by policymakers and providers – assuring ongoing quality improvement and accelerating the growth in short-stay, higher acuity patients.

An excerpt from the Walz-Shays letter to Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Boehner, is as follows:

“In recent months, the Administration sent to Congress proposals to enact deep cuts in Medicare spending for skilled nursing care. One proposal would eliminate Medicare’s annual inflation adjustment for SNFs, cutting nearly \$1 billion in 2009 alone. In addition, the Administration is proposing regulations that would cut another \$4.7 billion in Medicare funding for skilled nursing home care by 2013. Combined, these proposals would cut Medicare skilled nursing care by nearly \$19 per patient per day next year.

“We are deeply concerned about the impact that cuts of this magnitude would have on America’s most vulnerable seniors and the workers who care for them. At a time when Congress is working to stimulate economic activity and jobs growth, these Medicare cuts would jeopardize direct care jobs – 86% of which are held by women whose salaries are modest and whose families depend on receiving annual cost of living increases. We feel strongly that that these dedicated direct care workers are a key reason we have seen meaningful quality improvement in skilled nursing care in recent years.

“Nursing homes already operate on razor thin margins, the lowest of any health care provider group. Without stable Medicare payments, many SNFs will lack the resources they need to continue to invest in the building facilities and health information technology necessary to providing the highest quality of care.”

The forty other House Members co-signing the Walz-Shays letter, include: Neil Abercrombie (D-HI); Tom Allen (D-ME); Jason Altmire (D-PA); Tammy Baldwin (D-WI); John Barrow (D-GA); Shelley Berkley (D-NV); Sanford Bishop (D-GA); Vern Buchanan (R-FL); G.K. Butterfield (D-NC); Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV); Lois Capps (D-CA); Chris Carney (D-PA); Steve Cohen (D-TN); Joe Courtney (D-CT); Keith Ellison (D-MN); John Hall (D-NY); Darlene Hooley (D-OR); Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX); Patrick Kennedy (D-RI); James Langevin (D-RI); Ron Lewis (R-KY); Dave Loebsack (D-IA); Carolyn Maloney (D-NY); Ed Markey (D-MA); Doris Matsui (D-CA); Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY); Betty McCollum (D-MN); Jerry McNERney (D-CA); Brad Miller (D-NC); Jerrold Nadler (D-NY); James Oberstar (D-MN); Jon Porter (R-NV); David Price (D-NC); Laura Richardson (D-CA); Mike Ross (D-AR); Heath

Shuler (D-NC); Mike Thompson (D-CA); Chris Van Hollen (D-MD); John Yarmuth (D-KY); and Don Young (R-AK).

Rosenbloom said that in providing around the clock care and services to patients, skilled nursing facilities rely upon an annual Medicare cost of living update -- now possibly targeted for cuts -- to meet rising costs. "Upwards of 70 percent of a facility's operating costs are related to staffing -- and this crucial Medicare update allows for annual cost of living increases for staff, as well as the vital resources needed to refurbish facilities with modern equipment and technology."

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*The American Health Care Association (AHCA) and National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) represents nearly 11,000 non-profit and proprietary facilities dedicated to continuous improvement in the delivery of professional and compassionate care provided daily by millions of caring employees to 1.5 million of our nation's frail, elderly and disabled citizens who live in nursing facilities, assisted living residences, subacute centers and homes for persons with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. For more information, please visit [www.ahca.org](http://www.ahca.org).*

*The Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care ("The Alliance") is a coalition of 16 national long term care provider organizations that care for approximately 300,000 elderly and disabled patients each year in nearly 1,800 facilities across America. The Alliance is dedicated to improving the quality of nursing home care in the United States through measured results and outcomes and to assuring the government resources necessary to provide high quality care and services.*