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HHS, DOL ISSUE REPORT ON SHORTAGE OF LONG-TERM CARE WORKERS

Report Highlights Need For Innovation To Meet Demand As Baby Boom Generation Ages

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson and DOL Secretary Elaine Chao today released a report showing that by 2050 the nation will need three times as many long-term care workers as are employed now to meet the needs of the aging Baby Boom generation.

About 5.7 million to 6.5 million long-term care workers -- comprising nurses, nurse aids and home health and personal care workers -- will be needed to meet the nation's needs in 2050, up from about 1.9 million such workers employed in 2000. The report outlines a series of actions to bolster the long-term care workforce and promote quality care and services in the future.

"If we want to ensure quality long-term care for Baby Boomers, we need to act now to build the workforce and encourage creative ways to improve long-term care -- both in their own homes and communities and in long-term care institutions," Secretary Thompson said. "President Bush's New Freedom Initiative is helping to develop more and better options for long-term care, but we must build on these efforts with innovative solutions to meet this critical health care challenge."

"The shortage of long-term care workers, if left unaddressed, will affect all Americans in very personal ways. As Secretary of Labor, I work with individuals who are looking for a new job or greater opportunity," Secretary Chao said. "I want all workers to know that if they want to become a long-term care worker -- whatever their economic or educational status -- there are many resources to help them achieve their goal of caring for others. These resources are available through the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services and the private sector."

The report emphasizes the critical need to retain existing long-term care workers and attract new workers and to support state and local initiatives and test new models of recruitment and retention of long-term care workers. It urges continued support of many of the Bush Administration's existing efforts to address the growing demand for long-term care workers. These include:

- Supporting state and local initiatives that increase the recruitment and retention of direct care workers -- such as the DOL's Job Training Initiative, Apprenticeship Programs, and HHS' Real Choice System Change Grants, and the National Initiative for Direct Care Workers in Long-Term Care Settings;
- Continuing to support the training and education of long-term care workers through programs such as the DOL's One-Stop Career Centers, Youth Programs, Pilot Demonstration Programs,

Foreign Labor Certification Programs, the National Panel on Nursing, and HHS' Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, Advanced Education Nursing Program, Nursing Education and Practice Program, Nursing Workforce Diversity, and Nursing Education Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs;

- Continuing to examine issues of worker compensation, benefits, and safety through programs and projects such as DOL's National Emphasis Program, and HHS' National Clearinghouse of Innovative Provider Practices;
- Supporting ways to find new sources of workers and insure the adequacy of the existing workforce through DOL's Transition Assistance Program, and HHS' Nursing Workforce Diversity Program;
- Continuing to support research that provides more information to policymakers on the quality and availability of the long-term care workforce such as HHS' Regional Workforce Studies, National Survey of Nurses, Nursing Forecasting Model, Direct Care Workforce Survey, and DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The report also outlines steps and approaches designed to reduce the potential workforce shortage. These recommendations include:

- Continuing training and education efforts and implementing the Nursing Reinvestment Act, which was signed by President Bush in August 2002 and creates financial assistance programs for nursing students and support the nursing profession through public service announcements;
- Reaching out to faith-based and community-based organizations to see how they might increase the number of volunteers for family respite and caregiving;
- Engaging employers, employees, state and local officials, in a dialogue on issues related to pay, benefits, career ladders, skills required and working conditions in long-term care; and,
- Exploring ways to broaden the supply of long-term care workers by reaching out to older workers, former TANF recipients, military personnel transitioning to civilian life, individuals with recent experience providing care to family members, and young people.

The report is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/ltcwork.pdf> (PDF version) and <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/ltcwork.htm> (HTML version).

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