

*National Multiple Sclerosis Society – California Action Network
(MS-CAN)*

GOVERNMENT ISSUES ACTION REPORT

Fall 2007

**Special Session on Health Care Reform Provides Opportunity for
MS-CAN Input**

As the legislative session began winding down, it became clear that time had run out for the Governor and Legislature to come to agreement on a quality health care reform package. Therefore, on September 11 the Governor called a special legislative session to address health care reform. Under the terms of the special session, legislators will focus on crafting a health care reform proposal that all sides can agree on. MS-CAN will continue to join with other health care advocates in lobbying legislators and the Governor's office on its priorities.

MS-CAN, represented by Director of Public Policy, **Stewart Ferry**, has joined with two coalitions – California Chronic Care Coalition and the Disability Health Coalition – to advocate on behalf of a health reform package that is equitable, accessible, affordable and comprehensive for people living with multiple sclerosis. Two issues are of particular importance to MS-CAN:

- MS-CAN submitted a letter to all legislators and the Governor advocating inclusion of a guarantee of affordable health care coverage, regardless of health status, in any health reform package. Without provisions for a guarantee of health coverage, called guaranteed issue, a large percentage of those in critical need of health care, especially the chronically ill with pre-existing conditions, will be left out.
- In discussions about inclusion of disease prevention and health promotion as part of a health reform initiative, MS-CAN has lobbied

to include “maintaining function” to prevent further disability as an essential element of any prevention benefit.

MS-CAN Task Force Tackles Long Term Care Issues

A small task force of MS-CAN staff and volunteers has been meeting to determine what people with MS need to avoid nursing home placement when they are discharged from the hospital. These discussions will result in a position paper that will be widely distributed to policy makers. The paper will also be submitted to the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long Term Care which will be holding hearings in October and November in Sacramento and Los Angeles, respectively, on the state’s role in keeping aging and disabled people in their homes and communities when released from hospitals. Members of the task force include **Denise Nowack, and Kim Ktrola** of the Southern California Chapter, **Stephanie Fisher**, Executive Director of the Marilyn Hilton MS Achievement Center at UCLA, and **Nan Luke** from the Pacific Southcoast Chapter.

Stephanie Fisher will represent MS-CAN at the October hearing in Sacramento. She will be presenting information on the gaps in service for the younger disabled person and the role that the Marilyn Hilton MS Achievement Center plays in keeping people with MS out of institutional care.

Fiscal Year 2007/08 Budget Update

After a 54 day impasse, the Legislature finally passed and the Governor signed the FY 2007/08 state budget. As part of the agreement, the Governor used his “blue pencil” to eliminate \$700 million from the budget submitted to him by the Legislature. In general, health and social services programs were spared from drastic cuts. Following are budget items of interest to people with MS:

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/State Supplemental Payment (SSP) and In-Home Supportive Services:

- The final budget allocates \$147.3 million to fully fund the cost of living increases for SSI/SSP recipients. The budget provides for a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) of 3.7 percent. The

budget permanently reschedules from January to June the annual state SSI/SSP cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

- The budget keeps the state's contribution to IHSS worker wages and benefits that the Governor had proposed to limit.

Medi-Cal funding: The Governor reduced Medi-Cal funds by nearly \$332 million based on lower caseload estimates. However, since Medi-Cal is an entitlement program, funds will have to be paid if more patients enroll and caseloads increase.

Prescription Drug Program: The Governor deleted \$4.3 million intended specifically to fund local assistance implementation costs for the California Discount Prescription Drug Program that was passed last year. Elimination of these funds will delay implementing the program.

Conservatorship/Guardianship: The Governor reduced by \$17.3 million funding for the implementation of the Omnibus Conservatorship and Guardianship Reform Act of 2006 (Act) that assists seniors and dependent adults.

MS-CAN Legislative Update

The Legislature adjourned its regular session on September 12, 2007 taking action on MS-CAN priority bills. Most of the MS-CAN priority bills were adopted by the Legislature and sent to the Governor for his signature. Congratulations to MS-CAN advocates for all the letters, calls and visits made to legislators to assure passage of these bills.

AB 18 (Blakeslee) Disabled Persons: Signature Stamps

AB 18 would establish the Warren Mattingly Signature Stamp Act, which would provide that a person with a disability who is unable to write may use a signature stamp or authorize another person to use the stamp, to put his or her signature to a document any time that a signature is required by law or requested in connection with a transaction. The signature stamp would be treated in the same manner as a signature made in writing. Warren Mattingly was a developmentally disabled and wheelchair-bound man who was a committed advocate, dedicated to organizing people with disabilities to positively affect public policy on their own behalf.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 182 (Ma) In-home supportive services: provision of training for providers and recipients

AB 182 would require the State Department of Social Services to develop a standardized curriculum and materials to be used for training IHSS care workers.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 398 (Feuer) Long-term health care facilities: information

AB 398 would require the Department of Public Health to establish and maintain a long-term health care (LTC) facility consumer information services system by June 30, 2008.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 399 (Feuer) Long-term health care facilities

In order to improve the timing and quality of nursing home complaint investigations, AB 399 establishes a 40-day timeframe in which the Department of Public Health must complete a long-term care facility complaint investigation.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature.. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 463 (Huffman) Disabled parking

AB 463 allows a vehicle equipped with a lift, ramp, or assistive equipment used to load a disabled person to park across two stalls on a street or in a private off-street parking facility when no suitable sized parking space is available.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 537 (Swanson) Family and medical leave

AB 537 adds seriously ill grandparents, grandchildren, parents-in-laws, domestic partners and siblings to the list of family members that an employee can take job protected leave to care for under the California Family Rights Act (CFRA).

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 1113 (Brownley) Medi-Cal: eligibility

AB 1113 makes permanent, and increases eligibility for the Medi-Cal 250% California Working Disabled Program. This program provides an opportunity for working disabled persons to buy into the Medi-Cal program.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 1226 (Hayashi) Medi-Cal: Provider enrollment

AB 1226 will allow the Department of Health Services to process Medi-Cal provider applications more quickly, thereby assuring that there are more physicians in the state that accept Medi-Cal.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

AB 1298 (Jones) Personal information: disclosure

AB 1298 increases protections provided under California law to personal medical information. The bill would ensure that all personal health record companies are covered by California's Confidentiality of Medical Information Act to allow an individual to manage his or her medical information.

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.

SB 727 (Kuehl) Unemployment and disability compensation benefits: family temporary disability insurance: grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings

SB 727 would expand the scope of the family temporary disability insurance program to include grandparents, grandchildren, parents-in-law, and siblings within the definition of "family member."

MS-CAN Position: Support

Bill Status: Passed the Legislature. On the Governor's Desk.