

**WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE:
LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT IN
MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH**

Your Voice in Congress: How AMCHP Sets our Legislative Agenda

March 1st to 5th, 2008

MICHAEL FRASER: The answer to that question is tough and it's kind of a one that we don't answer, as a matter of fact. And the message that we give to folks is there's hard decisions that we have to make in this country and you're elected to do that, and we think moms, kids, and families are important. Because what we don't want to do is say, well, you could take some from healthy start, you know, or you could take a little bit from or there and get into that whole conversation, and that's not what we want. We'd love to see the pie increase for all the programs that support MCH. As you have so keenly been told several times today, I'm Mike Fraser with AMCHP and we are a joined this afternoon with two wonderful colleagues and I'm going to venture to say, particularly with Joshua, the one person potentially in the world who has spent the most time lobbying for Title V, if you think about it. Josh annually visits every member of congress, or tries to, to lobby for the Block Grant. That is Joshua's job and he does it very well. And so those lonely nights when you wake up and say, am I the only one in the world? You're not, but we know you do a lot of work.

Phyllis Lawyer is the, as I mentioned, the panel—this luncheon panel, the director of children—Medical Services in the state of Florida Department of

Health, and the President Elect of AMCHP. And, as she said, he mama didn't raise no dummy. Phyllis is a guru of healthcare financing policy. She has connections in Florida that definitely can help us tell the story of Title V not only in Florida but nationwide and I think is an excellent resource for us in AMCHP, but for you and your states as you're thinking about legislative activity. Phyllis is also part of our legislative committee.

And what we're going to talk about today is how do we set AMCHP's legislative agenda and what does that mean? And we have passed out our legislative agenda, and you can see how it's tiered into different sections. Our primary and priority issue is always, I believe, going to be funding for the Title V Block Grant. Our message to members of Congress is for this year, we are asking for full funding for the Title V Block Grant. And to date, we have received very positive feedback on that message. We have received folks saying we can understand why you're asking that. It's an ass that makes sense. Some members are behind it fully. Some have questions about it. Some goad us into trying to compete with other programs, honestly. But the message makes sense. Title V is fully authorized to \$850 million. Our numbers have been declining--level are declining for many years, as you know all too well. And as Title V directors and as the association of Title V directors, our job has to be to sustain our members' programs as job number one.

The part that gets confusion after that is what else do we do? We are an MCH group. We are a group of MCH leaders, but there are a lot of friends of Title V here in Washington and across the country that also have an investment not only in Title V but other issues. Newborn Hearing Screening, for one. Prematurity is another. All kinds of issues that affect the health of moms, kids, and families. And so our challenge, and one of the things that Phyllis is going to talk about is how do we sort, how do we vet--how do we filter all the different issues in which we could be working or on which we could be working so that the resource of AMCHP is focused on priorities?

We get calls ranging from bills that have very little to do with MCH to real core issues like WIC funding. And we have to be able to sort that out and say here's our job. Here is where we're going to focus. Here's what we're going to do in partnership. And here's what we're going to track and work on as a partner with other organizations.

AMCHP is a not-for-profit organization, a 501-C3--I was going to say 401(k), that's wrong. It's 501-C3, and our tax exemption status is, our tax exemption status is dependent upon a very small percentage of our time devoted to lobbying. There are other organizational types where we could do more. We're not a political action committee. We do a lot more than policy. We have a very robust program area, including things like this conference. And so we balance how much time we can spend lobbying. Because of our status and because of

our resources. As you know, we're funded about a third from the bureau, a third from CDC, and then a third through our reserves and a good stewardship of our resources. And for us to maintain a lobbying capacity, we depend on revenue from our conference, for example, dues that the states pay, and donations from other groups so that that's what we have available to devote to legislative activity. And I'm very, very pleased with what--how much we do with so few dollars.

And that's why it's so crucial for us to work with you as partners in advocacy because you help amplify the message that only three people are literally paid to do in Washington, and really only one does full time. So that's why we make sure that we let you know as family representatives, as family scholars, about opportunities to take our message to the hill and bring more feet and more mouths to the conversation about Title V.

If we're going to reach the goal of full funding for Title V, it's going to take all of us pushing that message. And both Joshua and Phyllis are going to talk about not only the full funding goal, but some of the other legislative activity. One of the things we've heard about from Title V directors, and this would be worth having a conversation about I believe in this session as well as the following session on advocacy, is just what Title V directors can do in terms of advocacy.

And maybe thinking about our activities as educating and informing versus lobbying is one way to think about it because you can certainly educate and

inform, you can certainly respond to lawmakers' request for information. And that's not lobbying. Lobbying is literally and very clearly defined as asking for specific resources for a specific program. Going to tell your story, going to show the impact, going to share the good work that you're doing at your state level is educating and informing. But it's a gray area, and it's one that's--one that people have to be very careful about obviously. No one wants to lose their jobs. No one wants to step over that line. But there's a way that each of us can help regardless of where we sit or who signs our paycheck.

What we know about this year, and again there's a lot of information to share, is that in the environment, in the funding environment that we have, Title V is part of the discretionary funding pot. And that discretionary funding pot is not getting any bigger. It's shrinking. That in the pego system, the Federal Discretionary Funding has to balance and that for us to get full funding for Title V, there may have to be some creative ways to come up with that \$184 million extra dollars. We think it can be done especially in light of the hard work that the legislative committee, families, Title V directors, and our staff are doing. Our ask sheet materials, the ones that we passed around are literally the piece of paper that we take when we visit with members of Congress.

The session that follows this session is going to talk more about how we work with Congress, in effects it's going to be a role-playing session, I believe, about what an ask looks like and a little fun there. But with the ask sheet, we're very

clear what we're asking for, why we're asking for it, and what the infresment will do. And this is a revised sheet that uses what AMCHP has done in the past but has refocused it, reformatted it, made it, I think, a lot more effective in terms of the messaging.

What it also doesn't do until the very back last page is used the "I" word-- infrastructure. We are very aware of Congress's dislike especially in this administration of funding infrastructure programs when they see service delivery as imported and where the government should be investing currently. And so part of the challenge of Title V a capacity building program, as a systems immigrator is describing the real impact of services even if it doesn't feel like you are service providers. So thinking through how you link to partners who would not otherwise be able to do the work that they do, the services they provide through Title V maybe a really effective strategy. And that's one of the things that the legislative committee and our staff are continually having to interpret. We go in with an ask sheet but also our state profiles or your state profiles so that we can show the services as well as the capacity that each state has and is funded through Title V.

The other thing that we're going to be doing more of, and I think you'll see it in the AMCHP On The Move pamphlet that was distributed this morning, is not just talking about what we're asking for, but telling the story of what Title V does so that members of Congress and our partners get a very clear picture of the

impact, the real impact that Title V has. And we're--again, we're going to rely on families to help us tell that story, as well as Title V directors and other MCH programs staff to recount literally how Title V is making a difference in a very structured way. We're going to bank those stories and then we're envisioning one side of a one-pager--one side being you're state profile, and then the back side literally being stories about what's happening in your state from the experience of individual surf through Title V programs so that you have the data picture and the compelling personal picture on one sheet that can be shared.

We know that that's an effective strategy when we look at how other organizations have maintained their budgets and actually increased them even in tough physical times like these.

So the overview that I'm providing is really to introduce some of the, the sausage factory of policy prioritization that the legislative committee and the healthcare financing committee are engaged with. And then the more political putting feet to it picture that Joshua is engaged with. So I'm going to turn it over to them, both Phyllis and Josh, to talk a little bit more about the legislative agenda, in particular the different priorities that we have, how that's formulated, and how that works with our board of directors and our general membership. So, Phyllis, if you wouldn't mind joining me up here?