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Nov. 26, 2008

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## NEWS

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### **PHCA PRESIDENT & CEO TO APPEAR ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAM TO DISCUSS HEALTH CARE, LONG-TERM CARE**

#### *Ensuring Care for Frailest, Most Vulnerable Elderly Must be Top Priority*

**HARRISBURG ---** The new political landscape has put a sharper focus on universal health care as a top domestic priority. But Dr. Stuart Shapiro, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association (PHCA), cautioned that speedy resolution of the issue is no guarantee.

“Consensus has built throughout America that our health-care system needs to be fundamentally reformed,” said Dr. Shapiro, who will appear on a statewide public affairs program this weekend to talk about the issue. “The political climate is ripe for real change, but a number of challenges exist that could make solving this complex issue extremely difficult.”

Among the challenges are the very real financial pressures facing Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, especially as more than 77 million baby boomers begin to retire and seek services. Dr. Shapiro said the nation’s financial markets and health-care systems are woefully unprepared for the rising ranks of beneficiaries.

The U.S. deficit will worsen by \$85 billion a year over the next 10 years because of near-term inflation and the weakening economy, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Spending on health care is driving that long-term outlook, the report states, with Medicare and Medicaid expenditures “a much larger, faster-growing and more immediate problem.”

The three major entitlements --- Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security --- currently consume nearly half of all federal spending and will take a larger bite each year, as the baby boomers enter retirement, said Dr. Shapiro, who first began working on universal health care when he wrote the original Kennedy-Mills legislation in 1973 as a senior aide to U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy.

What’s worse, many Americans misunderstand how these entitlement programs will support them as they age. A national poll found that most believe that Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security will pay for their long-term care needs. They are wrong. Social Security won’t, Medicare won’t except in very specific situations, such as short-term rehabilitation following surgery, and Medicaid only covers care for the very poor.

How to pay for and provide care for a rapidly aging population remains one of the country's most pressing social and financial challenges, Dr. Shapiro said.

Gov. Ed Rendell also is pushing a state-specific health-care plan to cover more Pennsylvanians. However, the state is facing a budget shortfall estimated to be as much as \$2 billion by the end of the fiscal year. Adding to those financial constraints is the commonwealth's aging population. Pennsylvania ranks third nationally by percentage of population age 65 or older, and fourth in the number of residents age 85 or older.

"Providing health insurance to those who need coverage is worthy, and I applaud our state and federal leaders for their work to this end," Dr. Shapiro said. "But the fiscal realities make the outcome daunting, if not overly expensive, in this economy."

"We need to turn our focus first and foremost to fixing and funding core government functions, and making sure the frailest elderly and neediest among us get the care they deserve and need to age with dignity and respect," Dr. Shapiro said. "We have to protect the 'Greatest Generation' that sacrificed so much to keep us safe."

Dr. Shapiro will discuss the issue this weekend on "Pennsylvania Newsmakers," with host Dr. G. Terry Madonna. "Pennsylvania Newsmakers" is the state's premier politics and public policy talk television show. The show will air regionally as indicated below:

- WGAL Channel 8 (Harrisburg and Lancaster) at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 30.
- WBPH (Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia) at 8:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 1.
- WKBS 47 (Altoona) at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 6.
- WPCB 40 (Pittsburgh) at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 6.
- CATV Channel 8 at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 2 and 1 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 3.

PHCA is a statewide advocacy organization for Pennsylvania's most vulnerable older residents and their providers of care. Members comprise for-profit, nonprofit and government providers. PHCA, along with its sister agency, the Center for Assisted Living Management, represents more than 310 long-term care and senior service providers that care for almost 33,500 elderly and disabled individuals.

For more information about PHCA, call 717-221-1800 or visit [www.phca.org](http://www.phca.org).

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