

THE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE ACT, H.R. 2400

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MAY 13, 2009

Problem

The Strategies To Address Antimicrobial Resistance (STAAR) Act has the potential to save many thousands of lives by strengthening the United States' response to infectious pathogens that are becoming increasingly resistant to existing antimicrobial drugs. Since the 1940s, the widespread availability of penicillin and the subsequent discovery of additional antibiotics have led to a dramatic reduction in illness and death from infectious diseases. Soldiers serving during World War II were among the first people in history to benefit from these "miracle drugs." Thousands of young soldiers' lives were saved. Today, antibiotics continue to save lives and also have led to many other advances in medicine including routine invasive surgeries, organ transplants, and other procedures that otherwise would be impossible due to resulting infections.

However, bacteria and other infectious disease-causing organisms – viruses, fungi, and parasites – through mutation and other mechanisms are able to develop resistance to antimicrobial drugs. The more antimicrobials are used, whether appropriately or inappropriately, the more quickly resistance develops. Infections caused by drug-resistant pathogens can cause serious, prolonged and debilitating illnesses and death. Literally, millions of people are at risk. Drug-resistant pathogens are a growing threat to all people, young and old, healthy and immune-compromised. Worrisome recent examples of drug resistance include vancomycin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (VRSA), community-associated methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), *Escherichia coli* (E-coli), and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB). Media reports about these threats occur on almost a daily-basis.

Response

"The impacts of antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be reduced by preserving the effectiveness of current antibiotics through infection control, vaccination and prudent use of antibiotics, and by developing new antibiotics specifically to treat infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria".

Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), 1995.

The STAAR Act builds upon the solutions identified in the OTA report as well as on existing federal efforts that have been highlighted in the Public Health Action Plan to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance. The Action Plan was published January 2001 by an interagency task force authorized under Section 319E of the Public Health Service Act. This authorization expired September 30, 2006. Thirteen key elements (out of a total of 84 elements) highlighted within the Action Plan are critically necessary to address the growing resistance crisis. Unfortunately, neither the task force nor the Action Plan has received adequate resources to accomplish its goals. Moreover, there exists no centralized office to coordinate and prioritize the federal response or provide a platform for on-going discussion and action nor is there a sufficient process for engaging outside experts to provide input into federal policymaking in this area.

The STAAR Act strengthens existing efforts by establishing an Antimicrobial Resistance Office (ARO) within the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health. The Director of ARO will serve as the director of the existing interagency task force. The Act also

establishes a Public Health Antimicrobial Advisory Board (PHAAB) comprised of infectious diseases and public health experts who will provide much needed advice about antimicrobial resistance and strategies to address it. Of importance, the STAAR Act will strengthen existing surveillance, data collection, and research activities as a means to reduce the inappropriate use of antimicrobials, develop and test new interventions to limit the spread of resistant organisms, and create new tools to detect, prevent and treat drug-resistant “bad bugs”.

For additional information, contact: Robert J. Guidos, JD, vice president of public policy & government relations, Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) at 703-299-0202 or rguidos@idsociety.org Additional information also is available on IDSA’s website at www.idsociety.org/STAARAct.htm