

Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of February 13, 2023

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Both the House and Senate are slowly ramping up for the 118th Congress, with the debt limit issue remaining the topline issue. Apologies if you expected coverage of the Chinese spy balloon(s).

A new report this week from the Congressional Budget Office estimates the federal government will hit the debt limit at some point between July and September. This is the issue that is expected to dominate Congress this year, potentially holding up other legislative items until a resolution is reached. The path forward on this issue remains unclear, and negotiations to cut spending that do not involve Medicare, Social Security, or defense spending will make those negotiations more difficult. Plus, any cuts to Medicaid or other social benefit programs will likely be met with strong resistance in the Democratic-controlled Senate. We are closely watching this issue and the potential policy ramifications of a negotiation between the GOP-controlled House and the White House to address the debt limit.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is holding a hearing this morning examining health workforce shortages. The focus of the hearing is likely on physician and nursing shortages, but it is a good opportunity to remind offices of the severe shortages affecting the long-term services and supports (LTSS) community. If Congress is going to meaningfully address this issue, they need to hear from all stakeholders, especially those who work on behalf of providers and patients.

Congress is on recess next week in observation of President's Day. When they return, expect some of the attention to shift to the President's budget and ramping up for FY24 appropriations.

Please [reach out](#) if you have any questions or need additional information.

Senate HELP Committee Holds First Hearing on Workforce Crisis

Yesterday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, held a hearing on "Examining Health Care Worker Shortages: Where Do We Go From Here?" The hearing is the first the committee has held during the 118th Congress, and places a highlight on the healthcare worker shortage. The hearing featured witnesses from healthcare organizations, the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, and other medical professionals. In addition, new HELP Committee Chair, Bernie Sanders (VT) highlighted

the lack of care people receive when they live in mostly rural areas.

- [View additional information related to the hearing from the Senate HELP website.](#)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: BEYOND CAPITOL HILL

COVID Public Health Emergency Resource Update

Last week, we outlined details of the Administration’s wind down of the federal public health emergency (PHE) for COVID-19. With the PHE set to expire on May 11, we want to continue to provide additional resources that may be helpful to you or those you serve, as they are released.

On Monday, the Administration announced it would end the federal public health emergency (PHE) for COVID-19 on May 11, 2023. This comes as the Administration approached its self-imposed February 11th deadline for giving all stakeholders 60 days’ notice of PHE termination. The end of the PHE has been a long time coming, and it is important to outline services and supports that will be affected by this news.

The following materials reflect recent changes and are currently available on the [CMS Emergencies Page](#):

- Provider-specific fact sheets for information about COVID-19 Public Health Emergency(PHE) waivers and flexibilities:
<https://www.cms.gov/coronavirus-waivers>
- CMS 1135 Waiver / Flexibility Request and Inquiry Form:
https://cmsqualitysupport.servicenowservices.com/cms_1135

We encourage you to regularly visit the [CMS Emergencies Page](#) for the most up to date information.

As you know, both Board and Member groups of Allies for Independence will be greatly affected by the PHE wind down (particularly related to renewals and application determinations). States may begin the Medicaid renewal process as early as February 1, 2023. It will be important for you or a loved one to take steps to make the redetermination process a bit easier:

1. Ensure that your state Medicaid agency has all of your current housing, email, and telephone information.
2. Check your mailbox (not your email) to ensure you receive your state Medicaid agency’s letter related to the status of your Medicaid coverage.
3. Complete and return your renewal form (if necessary) on time!

If you have any questions related to the wind down, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Add COVID Vaccinations to Immunization Schedule

As the PHE winds down, Allies will continue to relay new information related to COVID-19 to recipients of this newsletter. As such, we want to report that late last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it added COVID-19 vaccinations for children, adolescents and adults to its immunization schedule.

So, what does this mean? The addition of these agency recommendations formalizes guidance for health care providers and schools. While this guidance does not mandate vaccines, it will be important to keep track of states and localities, who will determine which vaccines will be required for school-aged children, as well as the populations who may qualify for vaccine medical exemption. Be on the look out for states who have nonmedical vaccination exemptions for religious/philosophical reasons.

The CDC recommends the following related to COVID immunization:

For children:

- The CDC [recommends](#) that healthy children 6 months to 4 years old receive a primary series of two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent Covid-19 vaccine followed by a third dose of a bivalent vaccine.
- Children aged 5 to 12 should receive two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine followed by a bivalent shot. Kids 12 and up should get either two doses of the Moderna, Pfizer or Novavax vaccine followed by a bivalent booster. Currently, only Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech manufacture updated bivalent shots that target coronavirus variants that were circulating widely last fall.
- Immunocompromised children should receive three doses of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine as a primary series instead of two, and should also receive a bivalent booster.
- Pediatric vaccines are smaller doses than adult vaccines, and in all cases, the CDC recommends that children receive doses appropriate for their age.

For adults:

- Healthy adults [should receive](#) a primary Covid-19 vaccination of two doses of the Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech or Novavax vaccine and a bivalent booster, similar to children. Some adults may choose to receive a Novavax booster instead if they would not like the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna shot, or those boosters aren't available.
- Adults with compromised immune systems should receive either two doses of the Novavax vaccine, or three doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine and a bivalent booster.
- The agency recommends that adults who got the one-dose Covid-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson and one booster dose, followed by a bivalent booster.

Administration for Community Living Releases Grand Funding to Promote COVID Vaccine Activities

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) recently awarded \$125 million in grants to USAging and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to increase the number of older adults and people with disabilities who have received the updated COVID-19 vaccine and annual flu vaccine. With this funding, USAging and NCOA will now disseminate funding across the country to organizations who serve

individuals with disabilities and those who are aging, including:

- Area agencies on aging
- Centers for independent living
- Senior and community centers
- Faith-based organizations
- Aging and disability resource centers/No Wrong Door system
- Government agencies
- Federally recognized nonprofit organizations
- Other community organizations that support and serve these populations

Of note: Applications will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis until **March 1, 2023**, or until funds are exhausted.

- [Learn more and view the application portal.](#)

Congressional Research Services Releases White Paper on U.S. Health Care Coverage and Spending

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) just released a new white paper which outlines “U.S. Health Care Coverage and Spending.” The CRS estimated that in 2021, nearly 69 million individuals (a little less than a quarter of Americans), received Medicaid or CHIP. These programs accounted for \$756 billion in spending. Of note, Medicaid spends the highest percentage of its expenditures on long-term services and supports, which include (1) other health, residential, and personal care; (2) nursing care facilities and continuing care retirement communities; and (3) home health care.

- [View the CRS white paper, “U.S. Health Care Coverage and Spending.”](#)

USC School of Gerontology Launches New Toolkit on Home Modifications for Individuals with Disabilities and Those Who are Aging

This week, the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology at the University of Southern California (USC) launched a new toolkit related to home modifications. The toolkit was created to promote aging in place and community living. The toolkit includes data briefs on home modification, technical assistance briefs, and fact sheets tailored to populations ranging from people with disabilities to those who are aging.

- [Access the USC Home Modification Toolkit.](#)

ISSUE OF THE WEEK: LEGISLATION TO KEEP UP WITH

Bipartisan “Stop the Wait Act” Introduced

This week, Senator Bob Casey (PA) and Representative Lloyd Doggett (TX-35) and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-1) introduced Stop the Wait Act (S. 320 and H.R. 883). This bill would eliminate mandated waiting periods imposed on individuals with disabilities prior to receiving Medicare coverage or disability benefits. For example, many individuals who apply for and receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits must wait for a five month period following the *onset* of their disability. Currently it is estimated that 1.6 million Americans are stuck in a “waiting” period. That just isn’t fair.

- [Learn more about the Stop the Wait Act.](#)

Social Security Expansion Act Introduced in Congress

On Monday, Representatives Schakowsky (IL), and Van Hoyle (OR), and Senators Sanders (VT) and Warren (MA) introduced legislation, the “Social Security Expansion Act.” This bill would expand Social Security Benefits by \$2,400 per year and ensure that Social Security is fully funded for the next 75 years. Social Security is important to both the disability and aging communities, and it is vital that this program is protected going forward.

- [View the press release on the Social Security Expansion Act.](#)

Medicaid Improvement and State Flexibility Act Introduced

In January, Representative Mark Green (TN) reintroduced the Medicaid Improvement and State Flexibility Act of 2022 (H.R. 629). This bill would authorize states to begin new pilot programs that would provide Medicaid recipients with a “credit card” designated for medical purchases. Anything not spent by the beneficiary would be returned to the holder at the end of the year in the form of an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). While we do not necessarily support this legislation, it is important to stay up-to-date with new ideas from both sides of the Congressional aisle.

- [View the legislative language of H.R. 629.](#)

ON THE HORIZION

Administration for Community Living to Hold Webinar on Home and Community Based Services Setting Rule

Next Tuesday, February 21, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) will hold a webinar related to strengthening advocacy in the home and community based services (HCBS) settings rule, “Getting the

Services You Need from the Waiver: The Participant-Centered Service Planning and Service Delivery.” Specifically, the webinar will review the Appendix D of the HCBS waiver and its impacts on the quality of services individuals receive. Representatives from Colorado will outline how the state is working to design person-centered planning and delivery/.

There is no need to register for the ACL webinar on February 21 from 3-5pm ET. Simply follow the directions below if you would like to listen in:

To join the webinar, please use the link and passcode below, or dial in via phone:

- Link: <https://hhsacl.zoomgov.com/j/1614346725>
- Passcode: ACLWeb@1
- Dial-in numbers: 669-254-5252 or 646-964-1167 or 415-449-4000 or 551-285-1373
- Webinar ID: 161 434 6725
- Passcode: 11897434

U.S. Department of Labor to Hold Webinar on Workplace Leave for Family Caregivers

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour Division, Women’s Bureau, Office of Disability Employment Policy, and Veterans’ Employment and Training Services will come together for a new webinar to discuss barriers to workplace leave for family caregivers. This webinar will feature officials from across DOL, as well as representatives from the aging and disability communities, who participate in Allies for Independence Board and Member activities.

- [Register for the webinar on February 23 from 2-3pm ET.](#)

RECOMMENDED READS

- [AARP, “For Older Adults with Disabilities, Finding Good Long Term Care Can Be ‘Hit and Miss.’”](#)
- [Health Affairs on “Adults Primary Care Physician Visits Increasingly Address Mental Health Concerns.”](#)
- [California legislators introduce bill \(S.B. 545\) that would pay \\$25 per hour for healthcare workers.](#)

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Thank you for your continued support of Allies for Independence. We hope you enjoy reading our “Washington Insights” Newsletter. Allies for Independence continues its work in bringing disability, aging, chronic illness, and other stakeholder groups together to work on creating a new non-Medicaid Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) financing model. Our weekly newsletter focuses on news you can use, as well as all topics related to LTSS.

We welcome all [feedback](#) from our readers.

Sincerely, Connie Garner
Executive Director

Allies for Independence promotes inclusion, equity, and economic security across the lifespan!

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