



Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of March 27, 2023

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Focus on Capitol Hill this week has been on the Administration's FY24 budget request. Several top government officials testified on the Administration's priorities while defending the Administration's actions over the past year. HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra had a marathon two weeks on Capitol Hill, testifying before multiple committees in both chambers. This process typically plays out into late April before appropriators begin marking up their respective bills at the subcommittee and full committee level.

However, House Republicans continue to delay the release of their FY24 budget making committee markups more difficult, if not impossible. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is angling to meet and negotiate with the White House around spending cuts, which would presumably be incorporated into the House GOP budget, in exchange for lifting the debt limit. President Biden continues to refuse to negotiate over lifting the debt limit, arguing that Republicans should not hold the nation's economy hostage to extract partisan spending reductions.

President Biden and Speaker McCarthy exchanged letters this week, the first public communication they have had on the debt limit in over a month. President Biden opened the door to meeting if Republicans can produce a budget in the next few weeks. This is not likely as Congress left town Friday for a two-week recess.

The posturing continues and will continue as we get closer to June, when federal regulators expect greater stress and attention on addressing the federal debt limit.

UPDATES: BEYOND CAPITOL HILL

Nevada Bill Would Phase Out Subminimum Wages

Last week, Nevada Assemblywoman Tracy Brown-May introduced legislation that would require providers of jobs and day training services to pay at least the state minimum wage to those with

intellectual or development disabilities by 2028. There are currently five organizations in Nevada with active Labor Department certificates and serve about 150 people with disabilities. Two of those organizations are transitioning right now, which will be completed by 2026. This remains a critical issue to follow as states move ahead on subminimum wage issues while the federal government struggles to advance the issue. You can view the bill by [clicking here](#).

North Carolina Signs Medicaid Expansion Bill into Law

On Monday, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper signed Medicaid expansion into law, a significant accomplishment years in the making that means 600,000 adults could qualify for the program. As Cooper pointed out, these are individuals who earn too much for traditional Medicaid but not enough to receive federal subsidies. This coverage gap is apparent in other states, too, meaning people forgo treatable or preventable illnesses. North Carolina Republicans long opposed Medicaid expansion and secured language in the bill requiring passage of a separate state budget law for expansion to be implemented. This gives Republicans some leverage over the implementation process, but observers believe North Carolina will be the 40th state to expand Medicaid.

Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Entities Receive Funding Awards to Improve Health Outcomes

The Pennsylvania Department of Health announced this week that it is awarding \$14 million to 127 long-term care facilities across the Commonwealth. The awards range from \$5,000-\$300,000 through the Long-Term Care Quality Investment Pilot Program, which directs funding to entities to promote workforce development, staff retention, and infection control measures. As the federal government struggles with workforce development at the national level, monitoring state level initiatives is essential to identifying potential bipartisan solutions.

You can read more about Pennsylvania's efforts by [clicking here](#).

Medicaid Unwinding Intensifies with Democratic Congressional Inquiry

Last week, over 60 lawmakers sent a letter calling on CMS to release state Medicaid unwinding data, such as the number of renewals initiated and call center volume, to understand whether state's policies are resulting in beneficiaries' redeterminations being denied despite still being eligible. Starting April 1, for the first time since March 2020, states will begin the process of redetermining eligibility status for 90 million Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries.

CMS insists that they have the enforcement authority to compel states to provide certain data throughout the unwinding process, but it could become more difficult as more states initiate this process this spring. This is going to be an issue of intense focus as the federal government transitions away from the public health emergency.

ISSUE OF THE WEEK: Wellness Care versus Illness Care: State of the U.S. Health Care System

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra testified across Capitol Hill the last two weeks, highlighting the Administration's FY24 budget proposal while also defending key decisions the Department has made from the FDA to CMS. One of Becerra's go-to talking points has been talking

about moving the nation from an illness care system to a wellness care system. Becerra noted that wellness care means investing early in in-home care, so older adults and individuals with disabilities can thrive at home and in their communities. He also highlighted the budget's \$150B investment in home- and community-based services.

Several members of the Ways & Means Committee mentioned long-term care in their remarks, including Ranking Member Richard Neal (MA) and Rep. Linda Sanchez (CA). It is going to be a challenge to secure this investment through the budget, especially given Republican headwinds around reducing spending to FY22 levels.

ON THE HORIZON

Several Disability Research Funding Opportunities Open

The National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) at the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has two new funding opportunities to address community living policy and research and capacity building for minority entities. The first opportunity is to engage in disability policy research, statistical analyses and modeling, and dissemination to contribute to policies that improve community living outcomes among people with disabilities. The second opportunity is to generate new research about the experiences and outcomes of individuals with disabilities from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. This grant opportunity closes May 22, 2023. For more information, please [click here](#).

Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research, Care, and Services Seeking Nominations

HHS is soliciting nominations for six new non-federal members of the Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research, Care, and Services. The council includes 12 non-federal members who fall into six categories: dementia caregivers; health care providers; representatives of state health departments; researchers with dementia-related expertise; voluntary health association representatives; and dementia patient advocates, including an advocate who is currently living with the disease. HHS is seeking nominations for one new member for each category. Nominations are due April 28, 2023. For more information, please [click here](#).

New Funding Opportunities for the Lifespan Respite Care Program

Last week, ACL announced two new funding opportunities to eligible entities under the Lifespan Respite Care Program. The goals of the program include improving equitable access to, and quality of, respite care services to all family caregivers. The first of the funding opportunities is titled, "Lifespan Respite Care Program: State Program Enhancement Grants," and the second opportunity is titled, "Lifespan Respite Care Program: Grants to New States and States Re-Establishing Their Core Respite Infrastructures." Both grants funding deadlines are May 15, 2023. For more information, please [click here](#).

6th Annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium Coming Up!

On May 11, 2023, the Biden Administration and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) will hold the 6th annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium. Public health practitioners, professionals in the aging network, mental health providers, health care professionals, and anyone interested in ensuring

the mental health of older adults should save the date and plan to attend this virtual event.

Be on the lookout for additional registration information in the coming weeks and learn more from NCOA!

RECOMMENDED READS

- *The 19th* – [How a Senate aide and her guide dog made Capitol Hill more accessible for all.](#)
 - *New Hampshire Bulletin* – [The siren is blaring for New Hampshire's long-term care crisis](#)
 - *Maui Now* – [Hawaii joins in effort to improve Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services](#)
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