

Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of May 8, 2023

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Congress is hurtling towards a major crisis over the debt limit. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen recently warned that the federal government could default as early as June 1st, but this has not led to any sort of breakthrough despite both sides agreeing to meet to work through this issue. Republicans have suggested that work requirements, rolling back unspent COVID relief funds, permitting reform, and spending caps are areas where compromise is possible. Democrats are discussing the Republicans' spending cuts, but are looking for other areas of compromise to address the debt limit, at least in the short-term. Democrats are unlikely to support such steep cuts, as outlined in the Limit, Save, Grow Act, which passed the House last month.

We are continuing to track this issue closely, as it will dominate Congress over the coming weeks. Please [click here](#) for a helpful advocacy tool kit from AUCD and the Autism Society.

With the end of the public health emergency now real, it will be critical to track how these issues impact vulnerable populations and providers who serve these communities. We cover some of the challenges with Medicaid redeterminations below, but encourage you to support growing calls for more support and resources to minimize this disruption. The American Association of People with Disability (AAPD) released [a statement](#) this week as well as a [toolkit](#) to amplify this message and stay engaged over the coming months.

If you have any questions on this topic, please let us know!

ON THE RADAR

Medicaid Unwinding Impacts in Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, New Hampshire

Five states began Medicaid redeterminations on April 1, the first time in nearly three years that states could conduct redeterminations and remove beneficiaries from their Medicaid rolls if they are found ineligible. Early indications suggest large numbers of beneficiaries will be removed in the coming months for a variety of reasons. In Arizona, the Kaiser Family Foundation's unwinding tracker found that

enrollment declined by 54,871.

In Arkansas, where advocates are concerned for Medicaid beneficiaries, the state removed nearly 73,000 individuals thus far. The overwhelming number of disenrollments were due to procedural issues, but nearly 80% of those who lost coverage were children or part of the expansion group. In Idaho, the state found that 60 percent of beneficiaries subject to redeterminations thus far were ineligible. The state will continue to send out 30,000 redeterminations notices each month until completed.

This process is going to be disruptive for beneficiaries and it is not clear if Congress is going to work together to minimize the disruption, or if it will be up to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to push states to proceed cautiously with redeterminations.

National Center for Assisted Living Report: Enhance Medicaid HCBS Waiver Initiatives

The National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) released a report and urged lawmakers to address the growing demand for long-term care. The report asserts that persistent underfunding in Medicaid creates barriers to care, even at a time when the need for care is expected to grow. They are also urging lawmakers to enhance Medicaid HCBS waiver initiatives.

The report states that while Medicaid spent approximately \$200 billion on long-term care in 2020, assisted living saves Medicaid around \$43 billion annually. As costs and demand increases, policymakers must explore ways to promote access to quality care in a variety of settings.

This is particularly relevant to the workforce discussions happening across Capitol Hill, although it is not certain Congress is focused on novel solutions to strengthening HCBS or the direct care workforce.

New York's Budget Provides Pay Increases for Home Health Workers, but Long-Term Concerns Remain

In New York, the Governor signed the state budget which provides changes to payment and operation of home health care agencies. Beginning in January 2024, the budget will increase the home care worker minimum hourly wage rate to \$18.55 downstate and \$17.55 for the rest of the state. These rates will increase to \$19.65 Downstate and \$18.65 for the rest of the state in January 2026.

These changes are intended to help with recruitment and retention, as there are many seniors and people with disabilities who struggle accessing home health aides. The budget plan seemingly provides a benefit but moving forward many are unsure if this raise will affect the supplemental wage rate. In other words, these workers may not actually see an increase in wages.

We will continue to follow this issue and encourage you to reach out with questions.

As the PHE Ends, Voters Want Congress to Prioritize Home-Based Services

AARP conducted a poll of voters that showed over two-thirds of all voters and 75% of voters over 50 want Congress to help seniors and individuals with disabilities live in their own homes. Over half these voters also want Congress to address family caregiving issues. The polling data also showed bipartisan support as 89% of Democrats and 72% of Republicans support expanding access to home-based services

for seniors. In addition to home based care, 89% of Democrats and 74% of Republicans said they support minimum staffing standards in nursing homes.

The Biden Administration has made long term care a focus in the FY 2024 budget with the proposal to include \$150 billion for home and community-based services.

ISSUE OF THE WEEK: Medicaid Access Rules Raise Questions for the Industry

Late last month, CMS unveiled two long-awaited rules intended to set new standards of care for Medicaid and through managed care plans. The proposed rule includes several notable provisions. In the HCBS space, CMS is proposing to require that at least 80 percent of Medicaid HCBS payments with respect to a) homemaker services, b) home health aide services, and c) personal care services be spent on compensation to direct care workers. CMS is also requiring the use of the Home and Community-Based Services Quality Measure Set in HCBS programs to “promote public transparency related to the administration of Medicaid-covered HCBS.” This proposal is of particular interest to the provider community as they go through changes with the unwinding of the public health emergency.

In the managed care rule, CMS is proposing that States develop and enforce wait time standards for routine appointments for four types of services: (1) outpatient mental health and substance use disorder; (2) primary care; obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GYN), and an additional type of service determined by the State. It is not clear how stakeholders will react to wait time standards given the workforce shortages and access issues, but these proposals demonstrate where CMS is looking to take the program in the future.

If you have questions about the rules, please let us know.

ON THE HORIZON

Women Speak: Insights and Policy Solutions for Lifelong Financial Security

On May 16, 2023, the National Council on Aging and the Women’s Institute for Secure Retirement are releasing survey research on women’s financial and retirement concerns and bipartisan policy solutions. The event, hosted by the Senate Special Committee on Aging and Bipartisan Women’s Caucus, will feature Bill McInturff and Celinda Lake to present on the findings of the research. Please RSVP by May 15th by [clicking here](#).

ICDR Webinar on COVID-19 Recession Impact on Individuals with Disabilities in Rural Communities

On May 17, 2023, the Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) is hosting a webinar on employment outcomes for people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are interested in registering, please [click here](#).

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is June 15th!

During the week of June 15, 2023, The Administration for Community Living will be sharing resources, hosting discussions, and promoting awareness about elder abuse around the themes of:

- Interdisciplinary partnerships
- Intergenerational collaboration
- Intervention & prevention
- Intersectionality of elder abuse
- International elder justice efforts

To find out more information please [click here](#).

NADRC Webinar on Building Aging- and Dementia-Friendly Systems

On Tuesday June 20 from 3:00-4:00 pm The National Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center will host a webinar that will teach participants about the age-friendly and the dementia-friendly health system movements, which are working to improve the health and well-being of older adults living with dementia and their families. The webinar will provide examples from the John A Hartford Foundation and MaineHealth. If you are interested in registering, please [click here](#).

RECOMMENDED READS

- USA Today – [How seniors can avoid financial ruin by planning long-term health care now](#)
- McKnight's Senior Living – [Long-term care staffing challenges likely to worsen, commission reports](#)
- *Colorado Newswire* – [With workers helping lead the way, Colorado can build a better care system](#)

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Allies for Independence wishes you all a Happy Mother's Day!

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

Contact us!

Connect with us!

[Click to email us.](#)



[@AdvanceCLASS](#)



[YouTube](#)

Published by Allies for Independence ·

www.alliesforindependence.org

Washington, D.C. ·