

Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of June 19, 2023

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Congress is about to set out on a two-week recess and will return to a very busy schedule between July and the end of the fiscal year. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees are moving quickly to mark up all 12 spending bills, with a goal of working through differences in total spending in time to avoid a continuing resolution. Unfortunately, the threat of a continuing resolution is real as House Republicans seek steep spending cuts that Senate Democrats are not supporting right now.

The House Energy & Commerce Committee has laid out several issues they intend to address before the end of the fiscal year, such as: (1) health workforce program reauthorizations; (2) the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA) reauthorization; (3) reauthorizing the opioid response bill known as the SUPPORT Act, and (4) legislative to reauthorize programs to address certain rare diseases. The Senate is expected to closely follow these priorities, although stakeholders are eagerly awaiting new legislation from the committee which is expected to be unveiled this summer.

The Senate Finance Committee is also expected to lean in on mental health and workforce issues, as they have signaled their interest in the space for several years. Given the bipartisan interest in that committee, expect to see that work folded into any potential moving vehicle to strengthen the health workforce. We are following this issue closely and will be providing updates as developments occur.

Lastly, it is important to note that there is significant interest in addressing prescription drug prices, with the focus largely on reining in pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs. This is worth noting since it would take up considerable time but could also yield notable savings to be used for other priorities.

Please reach out if you have any questions.

ON THE RADAR

HHS Takes Additional Action to Minimize Disruption from Medicaid Renewals

Last week, HHS announced new flexibilities to help keep Americans covered as more states resume Medicaid renewals. These flexibilities include: (1) allowing states to delay an administrative termination

for one month while the state conducts additional outreach; (2) allow pharmacies and community-based organizations to facilitate reinstatement of coverage for those who were recently disenrolled for procedural reasons; and, (3) allow managed care plans to assist people with Medicaid with completing their renewal forms, including completing certain parts of the renewal forms on their behalf.

CMS recently launched an “All Hands On Deck” campaign last week urging local stakeholders to work to keep every beneficiary covered. As we move further away from the end of the public health emergency (PHE), time is running out for the Administration to take steps to mitigate the disruption across states.

For more information on [these actions](#), or to view the letter from Secretary Becerra announcing these new flexibilities, please [click here](#).

New Survey: Salary Increases, Mental Health Support Needed for DSP Workforce

There has been intense focus on strengthening the direct care workforce. Congress is unable to find bipartisan solutions to the crisis, and the Administration’s proposed regulations have been met with mixed reactions from the provider community. A new survey from ANCOR and Relias conducted this year found that a significant number of DSPs felt unsupported by their employers, lacked career advancements, and did not feel adequately compensated for their work.

It is clear that DSPs need more support and, despite bipartisan support for HCBS, this support does not translate to action in Congress. As Medicaid goes through significant changes in the coming months, it is imperative stakeholders continue to engage and look for ways to strengthen the DSP community in a meaningful way.

If you are interested in viewing the survey, please [click here](#).

NEW! Funding Opportunity on Employment for People with Disabilities

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced a new funding opportunity for conducting interventional research to support its programs. They are seeking applications to be conducted across five priority areas:

- Eliminating the structural barriers for people with disabilities in the labor market, particularly for people of color and other underserved communities, that increase the likelihood of people receiving or applying for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Increasing employment and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities, including people of color and underserved communities (whether beneficiaries, applicants, or potential applicants of the SSDI or SSI programs).
- Coordinating planning between private and public human services agencies to improve the administration and effectiveness of the SSDI, SSI, and related programs.
- Assisting claimants in underserved communities to apply for or appeal decisions on claims for SSDI and SSI benefits.
- Conducting outreach to people with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI.

Applications for this funding opportunity are due by July 31. For more information, please [click here](#).

CMS Releases Resources to Support Adults with I/DD and Aging Caregivers

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released resources intended to support state Medicaid and partner agencies in developing the supports and services being delivered to adults with I/DD and their aging caregivers. These resources are intended to help agencies meet the needs of aging caregivers and adults with I/DD, design person-centered planning processes across the lifespan, develop policies to support aging caregivers, and demonstrate innovative strategies that states are implementing.

The resources are especially important because the number of people with I/DD receiving Medicaid home and community-based services and living with family has increased by 143% between 1998 and 2018. For more information, please [click here](#).

HHS Keeps Focus on Long COVID

HHS and SAMHSA issued a new advisory today titled, “Identification and Management of Mental Health Symptoms and Conditions Associated with Long COVID.” The advisory provides evidence-based resources to understand and identify mental health symptoms and conditions of long COVID. These conditions include, but are not limited to fatigue, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, psychosis, cognitive impairment, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, among others.

This advisory is part of the Administration’s plan to address long COVID and support the longer-term impacts of COVID-19. For more information, please [click here](#).

ICYMI! The Independent Life Presents “Self-Directed Home Care with Mark Altieri”

Self-Direction. Participant-Direction. Consumer-Direction. Regardless of what it is called in your state, these phrases represent a long term-care option for Medicaid eligible individuals and their families that puts them in control. If you or a loved one is an individual with disabilities, chronically ill, or simply aging, self-directed home care is your alternative for supporting you in performing everyday activities.

Mark Altieri works passionately to empower people who have chosen to remain independent in their homes and active within their communities. He talks about the services that his organization Public Partnerships offers, ranging from helping people navigate through complex systems of eligibility, enrolling people into the services they need, providing homecare services, and helping people to live an independent life.

This podcast, hosted by Tony Delisle, can be found where you listen to podcasts. If you use Apple, please [click here](#). For Spotify, [click here](#)!

ISSUE OF THE WEEK: ACL Proposes Update to Older Americans Act Program Regulations

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) issued a [proposed rule](#) updating the Older Americans Act, the first significant update to these programs since 1988. ACL notes that expectations for aging have changed dramatically over the last 35 years, and so has our understanding of aging and the factors that contribute to healthy aging.

The proposed rule clarifies requirements across many programs, such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program, addresses issues that emerged around flexibility serving older adults during state and national emergencies, and to better support the national aging services network that delivers these services.

The Older Americans Act has been amended seven times since 1988 and twice since 2015, with a new reauthorization on the horizon. As a result, there are certain programs that have no conforming rule, and several programs have not been updated via regulation. As such, this regulation is seeking to align with the existing law and is the result of years of engagement with the public.

We are reviewing and following this rule closely and encourage you to reach out with questions. For more information on the rule, please [click here](#).

ON THE HORIZON

ICDR Webinar: Virtual Stakeholder Meeting

Wednesday June 28, 2023 | 12:00-4:00 PM ET

The Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) annual virtual stakeholder meeting will focus on inclusion of people with disabilities across all facets of the disability and rehabilitation research landscape. The meeting will include a stakeholder panel discussion, presentations on topics in disability and rehabilitation research, and breakout groups to discuss the core focus areas of COVID-19, equity, and disability data and statistics.

HUD is Seeking to Update Section 504 Disability Rules

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development is seeking comments on potential changes to its regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 prohibits discrimination based on disability by federally administered or financed programs. The Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) is linked [here](#).

Comments are due July 24 and can be submitted by [clicking here](#).

Multiple Agencies Release Request for Information on Food is Medicine.

Twelve federal agencies, including ACL, have released a Request for Information (RFI) for research opportunities and best practices for Food is Medicine research programs. These programs include various activities and services that connect nutrition and health such as medically tailored meals, medically tailored and health food packages, or prescriptions for nutritious groceries or produce.

Comments can be submitted [here](#) until June 30, 2023.

RECOMMENDED READS

- *New York Times* – [States Try Easing the Burden of Long-Term Care’s High Cost](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* – [What if you can’t afford long-term care?](#)

- *The 19th* – [Disability and Aging Advocates Celebrate Supreme Court’s Talevski decision](#)

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