



## McDermottPlus Check-Up: June 11, 2021

McDermott+Consulting is pleased to provide the McDermottPlus Check-Up, your regular update on health care policy from Washington, DC.



**This Week's Dose:** Becerra defends U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) budget before three Congressional committees. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) welcomes new senior staff.

### Congress

- + **Becerra Testified on HHS Budget Before House and Senate Committees.** In three hearings this week, HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra reiterated many familiar talking points about President Biden's priorities for health care. Across the hearings, Becerra spoke favorably about telehealth's impact on access, the department's commitment to expanded health care coverage, the importance of health equity and a need to address the price of prescription drugs. During his Wednesday hearing with the Senate Appropriations Committee, Becerra stated that additional guidance on remaining Provider Relief Funds was forthcoming this month, but that it would only apply to new distributions. He also indicated that the Department may work toward reducing availability of short-term plans. Many questions at Thursday's hearing with [Senate Finance](#) focused on the Department's plan for a public option, which Secretary Becerra said he believed was necessary to ensure all Americans had a quality health plan available to them; however, Becerra said he looks to Congress to further those efforts.

### Administration

- + **CMS Filled Principal Deputy Administrator and Chief of Staff Roles.** After the confirmation of Chiquita Brooks-LaSure as CMS Administrator two weeks ago, the agency has begun to fill senior slots as it seeks to move forward with President Biden's agenda. Jon Blum will return to the agency to serve as Principal Deputy Administrator and Erin Richardson, who previously worked on the Ways & Means Committee and White House Domestic Policy Council, will fill the role of Chief of Staff to the Administrator. They join Liz Fowler, Deputy CMS Administrator who was appointed to lead the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) early in the Biden Administration. The Center for Medicare and Center for Medicaid Directors have not yet been named.

### States and Courts

- + **Florida and Texas Move Forward with Expanding Postpartum Medicaid Benefit.** The American Rescue Plan passed in March 2021 included an option for states to expand full Medicaid benefits for women enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP from 60 days to up to 12 months after the birth of a child. Several states have already submitted or are working on State Plan Amendments to take advantage of this option, but non-expansion states with large uninsured populations—like Texas and Florida—are of particular interest as the Biden Administration attempts to persuade holdout states on the case for expansion. Governor Ron DeSantis (R) has already signed the bill for Florida, extending benefits for the full 12 months, while Governor Greg Abbott (R) could sign the 6-month extension in Texas any day.



## Quick Hits

- + HHS will [distribute](#) nearly \$425 million to approximately 4,200 Rural Health Clinics to support COVID-19 testing and prevention in rural communities.
- + Rep. Jodey Arrington (R-TX) [introduced](#) the Accountable Care in Rural America Act aimed at improving performance standards for rural Accountable Care Organization Participants.
- + HHS says a [record number](#) of Americans are enrolled in Affordable Care Act plans, as insureds surpass an estimated 31 million.
- + Consumer organizations [asked](#) HHS, Labor and Treasury to ensure surprise medical billing (SMB) regulations protect patients. The first SMB rule has moved to the Office of Management and Budget for review, on track for the July 1 statutory deadline.
- + CMS will [increase](#) reimbursement for at-home COVID-19 vaccinations for beneficiaries by about \$35 per vaccine dose.
- + CMMI released a new [user guide](#) for participants in the Accountable Health Communities Model that provides additional information and best practices for using the Accountable Health Communities Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool across different clinical and social services settings.
- + The Duke Margolis Center for Health Policy published the [High Value Comprehensive Care for Individuals, Families, and Communities report](#), which discusses opportunities for improving health care delivery and outcomes through value-based payment. Our own Mara McDermott, Vice President, was a contributor to this report.
- + HHS [issues](#) revisions to Provider Relief Fund reporting requirements and timelines.

## M+ Resources

- + On this week's [Breakroom podcast](#), Rodney Whitlock and Aaron Badida discuss the possible outcomes and implications of *California v. Texas*.
- + Mara McDermott [discussed](#) the President's budget with former HHS official Jen Moughalian and McDermott Will & Emery partner Brian Stimson.

**NEXT WEEK'S DIAGNOSIS:** The U.S. Supreme Court could hand down its decision on *California v. Texas*, a major ruling for the Affordable Care Act's future. House Energy and Commerce will [examine](#) vaccine legislation. Senate Finance will hold a [hearing](#) on policy solutions for mental health. House Education and Labor will look at [policy priorities](#) at HHS.



For more information, contact [Aaron Badida](#), [Mara McDermott](#), [Kristen O'Brien](#) and [Katie Waldo](#).



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