



Health Policy Briefing

March 23, 2026

Senate Democrats Announce Effort to Lower Costs, Improve Health Coverage

Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) unveiled plans last week to tackle rising health care costs. Sen. Wyden and 11 other Senate Democrats – Mark Warner (Va.), Jon Ossoff (Ga.), Raphael Warnock (Ga.), Lisa Blunt Rochester (Del.), Tammy Baldwin (Wis.), Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.), Jeff Merkley (Ore.), Elissa Slotkin (Mich.), Elizabeth Warren (Mass.), Tina Smith (Minn.), and Peter Welch (Vt.) – sent a Dear Colleague [letter](#) stating their intention to develop policies “that lower costs, make it simpler to get and use insurance, and rein in shameless profiteering by corporate insurance companies.” Their efforts will be centered on the goals of (1) reversing Republican cost increases and reimagining a better path; (2) making health care simpler for families; and (3) taking on corporate greed. While specific legislative proposals are not detailed in the letter, the lawmakers plan to release more information in the coming weeks and months. Democrats also published a [flash report](#) in conjunction with their Dear Colleague that outlines the impact of the Trump administration’s health care agenda on costs and coverage.

Senate Appropriations Leadership Release FY 2027 Guidance

The Senate Appropriations Committee has released [guidance](#) for fiscal year (FY) 2027 programmatic, language, and congressionally directed spending (CDS) requests. Members of Congress have until April 7 to submit CDS requests and until April 14 to submit programmatic requests to the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee. Members have until April 21 to submit CDS and programmatic requests to the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee.

Inside

Comer, Aderholt Pen Letter on PBM Use of Utilization Management.....	2
Federal Court Blocks ACIP Changes.....	2
White House Releases AI Framework.....	2
CMS Convenes First Rural Health Transformation Summit.....	2
Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups.....	3
Recently Introduced Health Legislation.....	3

Comer, Aderholt Pen Letter on PBM Use of Utilization Management

Two House Republicans have written a [letter](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) asking the agency to ensure that pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) are not using prior authorization or step therapy to block access to physician-prescribed therapies. The letter, sent by Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman James Comer (R-Ky.) and Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-Health and Human Services Chairman Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.), urges CMS to use its oversight authority to prevent benefit designs that create barriers to appropriate care. “Drug selection must be individualized,” the letter argues. “Blanket step therapy requirements that force patients to try and fail on a PBM-preferred agent before accessing the prescribed one substitute cost and contracting preferences for clinical judgment.”

Federal Court Blocks ACIP Changes

A federal judge has blocked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from changing some childhood vaccinations from “routine” recommendations to “shared clinical decision making,” granting a motion for a preliminary injunction brought by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The decision from Judge Brian Murphy also temporarily blocks Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s appointments to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) while the case moves forward. The decision freezes the appointments of 13 ACIP members made between June and January, as well as all the ACIP votes taken during that time. The Committee postponed its scheduled March 18-19 meeting as a result of the decision. The panel had planned to discuss Covid vaccine injuries, long Covid, and ACIP’s recommendation methodology. It’s unclear whether HHS will appeal the preliminary injunction while the litigation proceeds in the district court.

White House Releases AI Framework

On Friday, the White House released a [National Policy Framework for Artificial Intelligence](#) which addresses seven key objectives. The White House noted that “this framework can succeed only if it is applied uniformly across the United States” while allowing for states to keep stricter laws that protect children. The framework also called on Congress to “turn this framework into a legislation that the President can sign.” In [response](#), Republican congressional leadership stressed that Congress must take action and expressed their intent to work to “enact a national framework that unleashes the full potential of AI, cements the U.S. as the global leader, and provides important protections for American families.” Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-N.J.), who serves on the House Committee on Financial Services Subcommittee on Digital Assets, Financial Technology, and Artificial Intelligence, [stated](#) that “While this framework takes steps in the right direction, including child safety and lower energy costs, it is still a half-measure that falls short of what’s necessary for ‘Smart AI’ regulation. AI is too important, — and too vital to our global competitiveness, economy, jobs, and families — to do anything short of a full-measure.”

CMS Convenes First Rural Health Transformation Summit

CMS convened a rural health transformation summit last week. The event featured leaders from state Rural Health Transformation Programs and the Office of Rural Health Transformation to discuss implementation priorities and progress nationwide. Last year’s Republican reconciliation bill established and provided \$50 billion to the Rural Health Transformation Program, with the aim of helping states strengthen and modernize their rural health systems. During the summit, state leaders highlighted efforts to strengthen local care delivery, shared best practices, and underscored the importance of integrating this work into health care financing and workforce structures.

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups

House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations legislative hearing; 2:15 p.m.; March 25

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Member Day; 2:30 p.m.; March 25

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Member Day; 10:00 a.m.; March 26

House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health legislative hearing "Policies to Protect Our Communities From Illicit Drug Threats;" 2:00 p.m.; March 26

Recently Introduced Health Legislation

H.Res.1117 — Expressing support for the designation of March as "Multiple System Atrophy Awareness Month" to strengthen public awareness of this neurodegenerative disorder; Sponsor: Mullin, Kevin [Rep.-D-CA-15]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.7952 — To amend title 10, United States Code, to prohibit a reduction in the number of personnel assigned to duty with a service review agency, to direct the Secretary of Defense to submit a report regarding consideration of reviews and appeals of discharges or dismissals, based on matters relating to post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to post a summary of such report online, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Walkinshaw, James R. [Rep.-D-VA-11]; Committees: House - Armed Services

S.Res.646 — A resolution recognizing March 14, 2026, as "Black Midwives Day" and the longstanding and invaluable contributions of Black midwives to maternal and infant health in the United States; Sponsor: Booker, Cory A. [Sen.-D-NJ]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.4106 — A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to improve access to certain medications under the TRICARE program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Cotton, Tom [Sen.-R-AR]; Committees: Senate – Judiciary

S.4109 — A bill to reauthorize the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act of 2005, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Reed, Jack [Sen.-D-RI]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.4110 — A bill to revise and extend health workforce programs under title VII of the Public Health Service Act; Sponsor: Reed, Jack [Sen.-D-RI]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.4118 — A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to ensure the integrity of hospice care furnished under the Medicare program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Warner, Mark R. [Sen.-D-VA]; Committees: Senate – Finance

H.Res.1120 — Supporting the recognition of March 14, 2026, as "Black Midwives Day" and the longstanding and invaluable contributions of Black midwives to maternal and infant health in the United States; Sponsor: Moore, Gwen [Rep.-D-WI-4]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Armed Services

H.R.7953 — To accelerate patient access to innovative medicines and clinical trials for life-threatening diseases by establishing a reciprocal approval mechanism with trusted international regulatory authorities; Sponsor: Sessions, Pete [Rep.-R-TX-17]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.7956 — State Offices of Rural Health Program Reauthorization Act of 2026; Sponsor: Fedorchak, Julie [Rep.-R-ND-At Large]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

- H.R.7961 — To exempt H-1B health care workers from the restriction under the Presidential Proclamation entitled “Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers”, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lawler, Michael [Rep.-R-NY-17]; Committees: House – Judiciary
- H.R.7966 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to ensure the integrity of hospice care furnished under the Medicare program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Sánchez, Linda T. [Rep.-D-CA-38]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce
- S.4131 — A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide market-based rate adjustments to certain providers for furnishing qualifying specialized surgical services to veterans under the Veterans Community Care Program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Cassidy, Bill [Sen.-R-LA]; Committees: Senate - Veterans’ Affairs
- S.4132 — A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to increase vaccination rates of pregnant and postpartum individuals, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Kaine, Tim [Sen.-D-VA]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
- S.4137 — A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide grants to outpatient mental health facilities for the provision of culturally competent, evidence-based mental health care for veterans, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Blackburn, Marsha [Sen.-R-TN]; Committees: Senate - Veterans’ Affairs
- H.R.7970 — To amend the Controlled Substances Act to permanently schedule 2-benzylbenzimidazole opioids (commonly referred to as nitazenes) as Schedule 1 controlled substances, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Latta, Robert E. [Rep.-R-OH-5]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Judiciary
- H.R.7973 — To end preventable maternal mortality, severe maternal morbidity, and maternal health disparities in the United States, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Underwood, Lauren [Rep.-D-IL-14]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Education and Workforce; Veterans’ Affairs; Natural Resources; Judiciary
- H.R.7976 — To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the retroactive payment of benefits for veterans with covered mental health conditions based on military sexual trauma, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Carbajal, Salud O. [Rep.-D-CA-24]; Committees: House - Veterans’ Affairs
- H.R.7980 — To amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to expand certain authorities with respect to the recall of controlled substances to apply with respect to all drugs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Dexter, Maxine [Rep.-D-OR-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce
- H.R.7983 — To amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit a chemical abortion without the physical presence of a healthcare provider; Sponsor: Miller, Mary E. [Rep.-R-IL-15]; Committees: House – Judiciary
- H.R.7985 — To prohibit the marketing, advertising, or provision of professional services without the appropriate licenses, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Mullin, Kevin [Rep.-D-CA-15]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce
- S.J.Res.141 — A joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to the withdrawal of the rule relating to “Debt Collection Practices (Regulation F); Deceptive and Unfair Collection of Medical Debt”; Sponsor: Warnock, Raphael G. [Sen.-D-GA]; Committees: Senate - Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
- S.4141 — A bill to amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to make temporary zero-percent interest loans under the community facilities direct loan program to construct or

renovate certain rural hospitals, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Bennet, Michael F. [Sen.-D-CO]; Committees: Senate - Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

S.4149 — A bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to convene a task force to develop strategies and coordinate efforts to eliminate preventable maternal mortality, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Blumenthal, Richard [Sen.-D-CT]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.4153 — A bill to phase out production of nonessential uses of perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances, to prohibit releases of all perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Durbin, Richard J. [Sen.-D-IL]; Committees: Senate - Environment and Public Works

H.R.7994 — To establish a grant program to provide schools with opioid overdose reversal drugs, to direct schools receiving Federal funds to report to certain Federal information systems any distribution of an opioid overdose reversal drug, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Ruiz, Raul [Rep.-D-CA-25]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Education and Workforce

H.R.8000 — To amend the Controlled Substances Act to schedule synthetic 7-hydroxymitragynine as a Schedule I controlled substance; Sponsor: Bilirakis, Gus M. [Rep.-R-FL-12]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Judiciary

H.R.8005 — To amend the Controlled Substances Act to prohibit certain acts related to fentanyl, analogues of fentanyl, and counterfeit substances, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Evans, Gabe [Rep.-R-CO-8]; Committees: House - Judiciary; Energy and Commerce

H.R.8008 — To address social determinants of maternal health to eliminate maternal mortality, severe maternal morbidity, and maternal health disparities, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Hayes, Jahana [Rep.-D-CT-5]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.8011 — To increase global health security, create more stable societies, and save lives, especially children's lives, by clarifying and focusing United States support for frontline health workers across global health and humanitarian investments, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Kiggans, Jennifer A. [Rep.-R-VA-2]; Committees: House - Foreign Affairs; Armed Services; Intelligence (Permanent Select)

H.R.8016 — To phase out production of nonessential uses of perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances, to prohibit releases of all perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances, and for other purposes; Sponsor: McCollum, Betty [Rep.-D-MN-4]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Oversight and Government Reform; Science, Space, and Technology; Transportation and Infrastructure; Armed Services

H.R.8018 — To regulate human cadaveric islets for transplantation as organs; Sponsor: Norman, Ralph [Rep.-R-SC-5]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.8022 — To require the Science and Technology Directorate in the Department of Homeland Security to work with the Drug Enforcement Agency to develop greater capacity to detect, identify, and disrupt illicit substances, such as nitazenes, in very low concentrations; Sponsor: Pfluger, August [Rep.-R-TX-11]; Committees: House - Homeland Security

H.R.8024 — To amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to maternal vaccination awareness and equity, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Sewell, Terri A. [Rep.-D-AL-7]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce