



Health Policy Briefing

October 12, 2026

GAO Decision on Withholding of AHRQ Funds

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), an independent, non-partisan agency that works for Congress, released a [report](#) on Wednesday asserting that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) fiscal year (FY) 2025 withholding of funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality was illegal. HHS did not spend \$78 million of the \$369 million appropriated by Congress for AHRQ in the last fiscal year, and the GAO found the decision in violation of the Impoundment Control Act. The report comes a year after several congressional Democrats requested a legal opinion from GAO on AHRQ funding. "Collectively, the substantial unobligated balance of funds near the close of the fiscal year, the cancellation of grant peer review sessions, the reduction in force separating key grant personnel from the agency, and admissions by agency management of funding uncertainty suggest a lack of intent to prudently obligate funds," GAO wrote in its report. The White House recently informed Congress of its intent to claw back \$28 million of the \$345 million that Congress appropriated to fund AHRQ for FY 2026.

Pallone Introduces NSA Reform Legislation

House Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) has introduced legislation to overhaul the No Surprises Act (NSA), the bipartisan 2020 law aimed at protecting patients from surprise medical bills. The Lower Premiums, Faster Payments Act (H.R. 10788) would replace the NSA's arbitration process with a benchmarking system under which insurers would pay providers based on the median in-network rate for a particular service in a given geographic area. Payments would be required to be issued within 30 days of the claim being filed. Pallone argues that the bill would address issues related to NSA implementation, stating that "a series of court decisions... have weakened (the guidelines for determining a fair payment amount under arbitration), resulting in increasingly large awards that overwhelmingly delay payments and drive up insurance premiums for millions of patients."

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House Lawmakers Send Bipartisan Letter on Remote Patient Monitoring

A bipartisan group of lawmakers in the House of Representatives have sent a [letter](#) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to share their concerns about a policy that would cut provider reimbursement for remote patient monitoring (RPM). The anti-fraud proposal would require doctors and hospitals to use their own staff to monitor patients via RPM, eliminating reimbursement for providers who use the RPM vendors' clinical staff for such monitoring. The legislators specifically express concern about the impact of the proposal on rural communities. The letter was led by Reps. David Kustoff (R-Tenn.) and Troy Balderson (R-Ohio), and signed by eight Democrats and 24 Republicans. Last month, Sens. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Mark Warner (D-Va.) sent a [letter](#) to CMS expressing similar concerns. Kustoff and Blackburn are the sponsors of the Remote Patient Monitoring Access Act (S. 1535/H.R. 3108) to improve Medicare coverage for RPM in rural areas. The bill was unanimously advanced by the House Ways and Means Committee in July.

Republicans Urge Scheduling of Kratom and Its Derivatives

Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Mike Lee (R-Utah), and Susan Collins (R-Maine) have sent a [letter](#) urging officials from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Food and Drug Administration to pursue permanent controls on the sale of kratom and its derivatives. The lawmakers ask the DEA to finalize its July proposed emergency scheduling order for 7-hydroxymitragynine, a chemical compound found in the kratom plant, and to permanently schedule MGM-15, MGM-16, and mitragynine pseudoindoxyl, semisynthetic derivatives related to compounds found in kratom that have been found in certain wellness products. "Permanently placing all levels of these synthetic compounds into Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act is an essential and necessary action to ensure the safety of kratom consumers and to keep products with compounds even more dangerous than 7-OH from widespread availability," the lawmakers write. The letter cites increasing poison-center reports of suspected nonfatal overdoses involving kratom or related compounds. A response is requested from the administration by October 15.

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Recently Introduced Health Legislation

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H.Res.1610 — Expressing support for the recognition of October 2026, as “World Menopause Awareness Month” and for global awareness and access to care during menopausal transition and post-menopause; Sponsor: Clarke, Yvette D. [Rep.-D-NY-9]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Armed Services; Veterans’ Affairs

H.Res.1613 — Expressing support for the recognition of October 5th as “National Peroxisomal Disorder Awareness Day”; Sponsor: Kim, Young [Rep.-R-CA-40]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10722 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to expand behavioral health workforce training programs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Carter, Troy A. [Rep.-D-LA-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10725 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for certain reforms with respect to medicare supplemental health insurance policies; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce

H.R.10726 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to allow individuals with Alzheimer’s disease to buy in to the Medicare program; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce

H.R.10727 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to give priority to expanding service applications from certain entities, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10728 — To provide that certain limits on State-directed payments under the Medicaid program not apply to certain maternity, labor, and delivery services; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10729 — To amend Public Law 119-21 to adjust limitations on State directed payments under the Medicaid program, and to repeal certain provisions related to provider taxes; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10730 — To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the premium tax credit, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

H.R.10731 — To adjust the cost pass-through for certified registered nurse anesthetists under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Davids, Sharice [Rep.-D-KS-3]; Committees: House - Ways and Means

H.R.10739 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to encourage qualified individuals to enter the forensic pathology workforce, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Guest, Michael [Rep.-R-MS-3]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

H.R.10747 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to ensure appropriate geographic adjustments to Medicare Advantage benchmarks in Puerto Rico; Sponsor: Ruiz, Raul [Rep.-D-CA-25]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce

H.Res.1617 — Recognizes October as “American Pharmacy Month” in honor of the contributions of pharmacists and pharmacy teams in providing safe, accessible, affordable, and effective patient care services and products to all residents and protecting public health in communities across the United States; Sponsor: Carter, Earl L. “Buddy” [Rep.-R-GA-1]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.10751 — To amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to remove restrictions on the provision of dental therapist services under the Community Health Aide Program, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Bergman, Jack [Rep.-R-

MI-1]; Committees: House - Natural Resources; Energy and Commerce

H.R.10760 — To establish a multiagency Middle School Mental Health Task Force at the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services; Sponsor: Kean, Thomas H. [Rep.-R-NJ-7]; Committees: House - Education and Workforce; Energy and Commerce