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Health Policy Briefing

November 23, 2026

Senate Appropriations Majority Releases Final Five FY 2027 Funding Bills

Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-Maine) released the text of the five remaining fiscal year (FY) 2027 funding bills last week: State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs; Defense; Financial Services and General Government; Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies; and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would receive $112 billion, $3 billion less than currently enacted funding – but a smaller reduction than that proposed by appropriators in the House of Representatives or by the President's budget. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) would receive $49 billion, an increase of $500 million over current spending. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would also receive a slight increase - $9.3 billion in total, an increase of $66.1 million above the currently enacted level.

Chair Collins and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-Wash.) have confirmed that they plan to include a provision to block the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) from finalizing its proposal to require political appointees to review discretionary grants, including those awarded by the NIH, in any upcoming continuing resolution (CR). Congress previously blocked the OMB rule's implementation in the CR enacted in September. Under that current stopgap spending bill, lawmakers face a December 11 government funding deadline.

White House Withdraws FDA Nominee

The White House has withdrawn the nomination of Heidi Overton, MD, PhD to serve as Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Her nomination was scheduled to be voted on by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee on November 18. HELP Chair Bill Cassidy, MD (R-La.) expressed surprise, stating that he believed Dr. Overton would have had the votes to advance out of committee. It appears unlikely that the White House will be able to advance a difference nominee before Democrats take control of the Senate in January, and current Acting FDA Commissioner Kyle Diamantas is planning to leave the administration by

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the end of the year.

In related news, the HELP Committee dropped consideration of Jim O'Neill's nomination to lead the National Science Foundation. Chair Cassidy stated that several members of the committee had concerns that "Mr. O'Neill did not do enough to stand up for science and against irresponsible decisions and statements from Secretary Kennedy." O'Neill previously served as acting director of the CDC and deputy director of HHS, during which time changes to vaccine policy and the firing of former CDC director Susan Monarez took place.

Jeffries Wins House Speaker Nomination

Democrats in the House of Representatives reelected Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) as party leader last week. Jeffries won the secret ballot amongst the incoming majority in a 251-11 vote. This puts him on track to be elected as Speaker of the House when his party assumes control of Congress in January. Rep. Jeffries has served in the House since 2013 and as minority leader since 2023. The full chamber will vote in early January to select a new speaker, and Jeffries is widely expected to have the 218 votes necessary to assume the role. If elected, Jeffries would become the first Black speaker in the history of the chamber.

Democrats also selected Rep. Lauren Underwood, RN (D-Ill.) to serve as the caucus vice chair. Rep. Underwood beat Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-Calif.) for the party's sixth-ranking position. Underwood is a registered nurse and champion of maternal health and clinical trial diversity legislation. She currently serves as a co-chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee and is a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Democrat Mary Peltola Wins Alaska Senate Race

Former Rep. Mary Peltola (D) has defeated incumbent Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) in the final Senate race of the 2026 midterm elections that had remained uncalled. Peltola will become the first Alaska Native to serve in the Senate, having held the same distinction during her time in the House of Representatives from 2022-2025. Now that the Alaska race has been called, the Senate will officially have 56 Democrats and 44 Republicans when the 120th Congress convenes in January.

GAO Issues Recommendations on Fraud Risk Management in Fee-for-Service

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released a new report recommending that Medicare improve its process for managing fraud risks in the fee-for-service program. The agency identified fraud risks affecting Medicare that the Center for Program Integrity did not identify or assess as part of its Vulnerability Management Process, including phishing attempts and fraudulently established DME companies. GAO makes four recommendations to HHS, including that it update and finalize risk management guidance to include designing and regularly performing comprehensive fraud risk assessments consistent with leading practices and internal control requirements.

Congressional Advisory Body Releases Report on China and Biopharmaceutical Innovation

The National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology (NSCEB) has released a new analysis detailing China's dominance over innovative drug technologies and processes. NSCEB found that U.S. and global pharmaceutical companies are making deals with Chinese biotechnology companies earlier in the drug discovery process, including before initial clinical trials. The terms of the deals are also increasingly favoring Chinese biotech startups or licensors, moving from single-asset agreements to multi-asset or platform co-development and co-commercialization deals. The Commission urges policymakers to "act now to empower the United States to out-innovate strategic competitors before it's too late."

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups

Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing "Caregivers and AI: Opportunities, Challenges, and Threats;" 3:30 p.m.; December 2

Recently Introduced Health Legislation

H.R.11035 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, to award grants to support community-based programs for harm reduction services for individuals who use substances; Sponsor: Larsen, Rick [Rep.-D-WA-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

S.5722 — A bill to amend the definition of professional degree in the Higher Education Act of 1965. Sponsor: Gillibrand, Kirsten E. [Sen.-D-NY]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5719 — A bill to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to clarify that whole genome and whole exome sequencing for children with certain medical needs is covered under the Medicaid program. Sponsor: Wicker, Roger F. [Sen.-R-MS]; Committees: Senate - Finance

S.5724 — A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to establish requirements with respect to the use of prior authorization and claims denial under Medicare Advantage plans; Sponsor: Kennedy, John [Sen.-R-LA]; Committees: Senate – Finance

S.5729 — A bill to establish education partnership programs between public schools and public health agencies to prevent the misuse and overdose of synthetic opioids by youth, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Hassan, Margaret Wood [Sen.-D-NH]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5731 — A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to treat qualified water competency and water safety lesson expenses as medical expenses; Sponsor: Justice, James C. [Sen.-R-WV]; Committees: Senate – Finance

S.5732 — A bill to amend the 21st Century Cures Act and the Public Health Service Act to ensure that expenses relating to the acquisition or use of devices for use in the detection of fentanyl, xylazine, and other emerging adulterant substances, including test strips, are allowable expenses under certain grant programs; Sponsor: Booker, Cory A. [Sen.-D-NJ]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5735 — A bill to allow Americans to receive paid leave time to process and address their own health needs and the health needs of their partners during the period following a pregnancy loss, an intrauterine insemination or an assisted reproductive technology procedure that did not result in a live birth, a stillbirth, a failed adoption arrangement, a failed surrogacy arrangement, or a diagnosis or event that impacts pregnancy or fertility, to support related research and education, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Duckworth, Tammy [Sen.-D-IL]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

H.Res.1664 — Expressing support for the designation of "Prematurity Awareness Month"; Sponsor: McClellan, Jennifer L. [Rep.-D-VA-4]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11039 — To expand Federal investment in pediatric cancer research, improve access to clinical trials, support holistic and innovative therapies, reduce the financial burden on families, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Boyle, Brendan F. [Rep.-D-PA-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Budget; Ways and Means

H.R.11041 — To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to protect against high out-of-pocket expenditures for Medicare fee-for-service benefits, and to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to enhance programs that

protect low-income Medicare beneficiaries; Sponsor: Dingell, Debbie [Rep.-D-MI-6]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means

H.R.11045 — To amend the 21st Century Cures Act and the Public Health Service Act to ensure that expenses relating to the acquisition or use of devices for use in the detection of fentanyl, xylazine, and other emerging adulterant substances, including test strips, are allowable expenses under certain grant programs; Sponsor: Gottheimer, Josh [Rep.-D-NJ-5]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11050 — To allow Americans to receive paid leave time to process and address their own health needs and the health needs of their partners during the period following a pregnancy loss, an intrauterine insemination or an assisted reproductive technology procedure that did not result in a live birth, a stillbirth, a failed adoption arrangement, a failed surrogacy arrangement, or a diagnosis or event that impacts pregnancy or fertility, to support related research and education, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Pressley, Ayanna [Rep.-D-MA-7]; Committees: House – Education and Workforce; House Administration; Oversight and Government Reform; Judiciary; Energy and Commerce

H.R.11054 — To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health, to create educational materials with respect to covered disorders for elementary and secondary school students, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Williams, Nikema [Rep.-D-GA-5]; Committees: House - Education and Workforce; Energy and Commerce

S.5738 — A bill to ensure the Department of Health and Human Services will manage accreditation for foreign medical schools, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Lee, Mike [Sen.-R-UT]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5747 — A bill to protect against seasonal and pandemic influenza, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Baldwin, Tammy [Sen.-D-WI]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5752 — A bill to increase utilization of breast cancer risk assessment tools, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Kelly, Mark [Sen.-D-AZ]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5754 — A bill to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to clarify the intent of Congress with regards to Medicaid financing policies; Sponsor: Tuberville, Tommy [Sen.-R-AL]; Committees: Senate – Finance

H.R.11065 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to prohibit the National Institutes of Health from conducting or supporting research that causes significant pain or distress to a nonhuman primate, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Mace, Nancy [Rep.-R-SC-1]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11068 — To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow small group market bronze plans in connection with health savings accounts; Sponsor: Moran, Nathaniel [Rep.-R-TX-1]; Committees: House - Ways and Means

H.R.11071 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to improve the public health system in tribal communities and increase the number of American Indians and Alaska Natives pursuing health careers, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Ruiz, Raul [Rep.-D-CA-25]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

S.Res.966 — A resolution designating November 19, 2026, as "National Rural Health Day"; Sponsor: Barrasso, John [Sen.-R-WY]; Submitted in the Senate, considered, and agreed to without amendment and with a preamble by Unanimous Consent.

S.5772 — A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a program to augment holistic rehabilitative care for beneficiaries with limb loss or limb dysfunction through peer mentoring, education, and community outreach, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Duckworth, Tammy [Sen.-D-IL]; Committees: Senate - Armed Services

S.5773 — A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to expedite specialty care referrals for members of the Armed Forces and beneficiaries under the TRICARE program who are undergoing a permanent change of station, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Duckworth, Tammy [Sen.-D-IL]; Committees: Senate - Armed Services

S.5779 — A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a pilot program on blood pressure monitoring for at-risk pregnant and postpartum beneficiaries under the TRICARE program to increase the rate of early detection of hypertensive disorder related to pregnancy and postpartum, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Duckworth, Tammy [Sen.-D-IL]; Committees: Senate - Armed Services

S.5787 — A bill to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to revise the definition of institution for mental diseases under the Medicaid program to exclude institutions of 17 to 32 beds that meet certain standards; Sponsor: Padilla, Alex [Sen.-D-CA]; Committees: Senate – Finance

S.5788 — A bill to amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to authorize a special behavioral health program for Indians, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Smith, Tina [Sen.-D-MN]; Committees: Senate - Indian Affairs

S.5795 — A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize grants to States, Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, and political subdivisions thereof to hire, employ, train, and dispatch mental health professionals to respond in lieu of law enforcement officers in emergences involving one or more persons with a mental illness or an intellectual or developmental disability, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Warren, Elizabeth [Sen.-D-MA]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

S.5797 — A bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a demonstration project to increase access to biosimilar biological products under the Medicare program; Sponsor: Bennet, Michael F. [Sen.-D-CO]; Committees: Senate – Finance

S.5804 — A bill to establish a grant to provide mental and behavioral health services and diversion programs to at-risk youth, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Booker, Cory A. [Sen.-D-NJ]; Committees: Senate – Judiciary

S.5812 — A bill to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to permanently extend the authority of the Secretary of Health and Human Services to award priority review vouchers for rare pediatric disease products; Sponsor: Moody, Ashley [Sen.-R-FL]; Committees: Senate - Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

H.Res.1673 — Supporting the goals and ideals of "National Rural Health Day"; Sponsor: Tokuda, Jill N. [Rep.-D-HI-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11079 — To amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act, and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to require group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group or individual health insurance coverage to provide coverage for additional preventive and management care for individuals with chronic conditions without the imposition of cost sharing requirement, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Underwood, Lauren [Rep.-D-IL-14]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Ways and Means; Education and Workforce

H.R.11096 — To amend the Public Health Service to require the Secretary to award grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements to eligible entities to establish, maintain, or improve activities related to the detection and monitoring of infectious diseases through wastewater for public health emergency preparedness and response purposes, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Fry, Russell [Rep.-R-SC-7]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11116 — To authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Director of the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to award grants to implement innovative approaches to securing prompt access to appropriate follow-on care for individuals who experience an acute

mental health episode and present for care in an emergency department, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Ruiz, Raul [Rep.-D-CA-25]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.11117 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize grants to States, Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, and political subdivisions thereof to hire, employ, train, and dispatch mental health professionals to respond in lieu of law enforcement officers in emergencies involving one or more persons with a mental illness or an intellectual or developmental disability, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Scanlon, Mary Gay [Rep.-D-PA-5]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Judiciary