

Allies for Independence Washington Insights

Week of March 6, 2023

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

This week feels more like the official launch of the 118th Congress. In addition to the White House releasing their proposed FY24 budget this week, both chambers are in session, holding hearings, and signaling the direction of several important policy issues for this year.

The Senate HELP Committee released a [Request for Information](#) (RFI) on health care workforce shortages. The Committee is seeking information on the drivers of health care workforce shortages and ideas on potential solutions. If you are interested in submitting comments, please send them to HealthWorkforceComments@help.senate.gov by March 20, 2023.

The Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee marked up several health care related bills this week, including the Protecting Health Care for All Patients Act of 2023, which prohibits all federal health care programs from using prices that are based on quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) to determine relevant thresholds for coverage and reimbursement. This is a priority item for Chair McMorris Rodgers and will likely continue to be on the radar of the committee in the months ahead. *We've included additional information on this hearing below.*

In the Senate, there is a working group led by Sen. Angus King (I-ME) and Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) discussing bipartisan solutions to strengthening Medicare and Social Security. These discussions are extremely delicate, and both sides acknowledge the complex and uncertain way forward given the landscape for policy issues this Congress. In addition, we anticipate that Senator Casey (D-PA) will be introducing the [HCBS Access Act](#) in the coming weeks. Once we have more information, we will make sure to pass that along to you.

The big issue is the debt limit and the standoff is still in its early stages with neither side offering any concessions to avoid fiscal calamity. The expectation is that this issue will dominate Capitol Hill into the summer, making it difficult to move other legislation that is not must-pass. This will not stop both chambers from moving forward on FY24 appropriations, but it will complicate securing a bipartisan, bicameral agreement until the debt limit issue is resolved.

In the coming weeks, expect both House and Senate Appropriations Committee's to convene hearings to

hear from key Administration officials on priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. In addition, we will provide you with updates on the President’s budget in the coming week.

Coming Soon: Notable Hearings

Wednesday March 22nd

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Taxpayers Paid Billions For It: Why Would Moderna Consider Quadrupling the Price of the COVID Vaccine?

- [Get additional information.](#)

Thursday March 23rd

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Public Witness Hearing

The deadline to submit requests to testify is Friday March 3rd.

- [Get additional information.](#)

Please [reach out](#) if you have any questions or need additional information.

UPDATES: BEYOND CAPITOL HILL

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month!

Just a note to let you know that March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness (DDAM) Month. The purpose of DDAM is to raise awareness of inclusion and contributions of individuals with developmental disabilities. 2023’s theme is “Beyond the Conversation,” and focuses on what will come next for this population. This includes innovation in technologies and how individuals and communities are working to ensure this population can live and work in their own communities through education, employment, and accessibility.

- Get additional information on DDAM from the [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#), and be sure to [register for the Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center \(DETAC\) Webinar](#) on celebrating DDAM, which is scheduled for March 14th at 3pm ET.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to Take Steps to Help States Support Relative Caregivers with Evidence-Based Programs

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a new study this week which provides insight on how kinship navigator programs provide information to caregivers on programs and services to meet their needs and the needs of the children they are raising. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) identified program elements, including, providing services tailored to meet the unique needs of individual families and pairing caregivers with mentors with lived experience, as beneficial to families. It

is important to note that states have not accessed federal matching funds for evidence-based kinship navigator programs as of December 2022. However, programs have been approved in Ohio, Arizona, and Colorado.

- [View the full GAO study.](#)

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Holds Hearing on Supporting Communities of Care

Earlier today, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing, “Uplifting Families, Workers, and Older Adults: Supporting Communities of Care.” Hearing witnesses included representatives from the provider community, direct care workers, and individuals from the higher education community. During the hearing, Senator Casey highlighted the serious need for home and community based services (HCBS), as well as the Better Care Better Jobs Act (S. 100), which he reintroduced at the beginning of the 118th Congress.

- [Get more information and watch today’s hearing.](#)

Senators Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Increase Mental Health Access

U.S. Senators Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Martin Heinrich (D-NM) introduced [Increasing Mental Health Options Act of 2023](#) to update Medicare to provide beneficiaries with access to clinical psychologist directly for mental health services regardless of the care setting. This bill would specifically address older Americans who receive services through Medicare. In addition, the bill would attempt to break down barriers to care that many individuals who live in rural areas face.

- [View the “Increasing Mental Health Options Act of 2023” text](#) and [explore the Senate press release on the bill.](#)

ISSUE OF THE WEEK: House Energy and Commerce Committee Holds Health Subcommittee Markup

Yesterday, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA) announced a markup on five pieces of legislation related to mental health, QALYs, and other issues.

We specifically wanted to highlight the bill “Protecting Health Care for All Patients Act of 2023” (H.R.485). If enacted, this bill would prohibit the use of Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) and similar measures in coverage and payment determinations under federal health programs. Allies for Independence has fought against the use of QALYs and will continue to do so because they limit access to life-sustaining and lifesaving drugs and treatments for people with disabilities and other chronic conditions.

- [View H.R. 485 to learn more.](#)

ON THE HORIZON

Person-Centered Methods for Expanding Self-Determination in Provider-Directed Services

The National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems is hosting a webinar to explore strategies and resources to assist Home and Community Based Service providers in championing self-determination among the people they serve. The purpose of this webinar is for experts, providers, and individuals with lived experiences to share best practices for assessing and addressing risk through person centered practices while balancing choice, decision-making, and satisfaction. The webinar will also highlight the importance of direct care professionals.

- This event will occur on Wednesday March 15, 2023, from 3 to 4pm ET. The link to register can be found [here](#).

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to Hold Webinar on Unwinding Home and Community-Based Services Public Health Emergency Flexibilities

On March 15, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will hold a webinar to discuss Unwinding Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Public Health Emergency (PHE) Flexibilities. Not only will the webinar discuss state requirements and opportunities for resuming Medicaid HCBS operations, but it will also include the following:

1. CMS resources to support states in unwinding PHE flexibilities, including considerations for HCBS.
 2. Overview of HCBS-related PHE flexibilities to unwind, with a focus on the 1915(c) HCBS Appendix K authority.
 3. Overview of HCBS-related PHE flexibilities that can be made permanent in 1915(c) waivers and the CMS approval process.
 4. Other considerations for HCBS programs when unwinding from the PHE.
- [Register for the webinar on March 15 from 2-3:30pm ET.](#)

Interagency Committee on Disability Research to Hold Webinar on COVID-19 and Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) will host, "COVID-19 Data on Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities." During this webinar, attendees will hear information about state collection and reporting of COVID-19 data for the I/DD population.

Presenters will include:

- Emma Plourde, Public Health Policy Analyst, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, HHS
 - William Haltermann III, Program Specialist, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and
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Evaluation, HHS

At the end of the presentation, there will a 15-minute Q&A session.

- [Register ahead of time for this webinar on March 22, 2023 at 12pm ET.](#)

6th Annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium Coming Up!

On May 11, 2023, the Biden Administration and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) will hold the 6th annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium. Public health practitioners, professionals in the aging network, mental health providers, health care professionals, and anyone interested in ensuring the mental health of older adults should save the date and plan on attending this virtual event.

Be on the lookout for additional registration information in the coming weeks and learn more from NCOA!

***The Hill* to Hold Virtual Disability Summit**

On March 29, *The Hill* is scheduled to hold a virtual disability summit that will address “practical solutions to increase employment across the disability community and achieving employment for all.” Speakers at the summit will include Representative Debbie Dingell (MI), Co-Chair of the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, Armando Contreras, CEO of UCP, and Day Al-Mohamed, the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council for Disability Policy.

- [Register for the free summit on March 29 at 1pm ET.](#)

RECOMMENDED READS

- [President Biden Pays Respects to Judith Heumann](#)
- *Kaiser Health News* – [“As Long-Term Care Staffing Crisis Worsens, Immigrants Can Bridge the Gaps”](#)
- *Disability Scoop* – [“Biden Promises to Fight GOP on Gutting Medicaid”](#)
- *Stat News* – [“An intimate look at dementia – and the emotional toll it takes on family and caregivers”](#)

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In Memoriam, Judith D. Heumann (1947-2023)

This week, we honor and remember a true hero to people with disabilities. Judy Heumann was our hero in so many ways. She provided guidance and support to people with disabilities that created the movement toward independence through the accessibility to programs and places that were previously unavailable to people with functional limitations.

Because of her efforts, schools are accepting of students with disabilities. Early intervention is now supporting new mothers and families of children with developmental disabilities. Colleges are now making adaptations to accommodate students with disabilities in higher education. Finally, Judy helped create a path forward for the employment of people with disabilities. All of these initiatives create a way for individuals to live and work in their own communities.

We thank Judy for her commitment and resilience on behalf of children and adults with special needs. We will continue to fight for the rights of people with disabilities.

Allies for Independence promotes inclusion, equity, and economic security across the lifespan!

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