

## Allies for Independence Washington Insights

**Week of May 22, 2023**

### CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

House Republicans are meeting at the White House today for talks on the debt limit with eight days until a potential default. The issues center around government funding and work requirements for certain social safety-net programs. On government funding, Speaker McCarthy has insisted on the federal government returning to FY22 levels, which would represent a \$130B cut, whereas the White House would agree to freeze spending at current levels. Republicans are dug in on this issue, insisting on spending cuts for lifting the \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit.

The focus of current discussions on work requirements centers around the scope of potential work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. Republicans would like to see work requirements in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, which would save roughly \$120B over the next decade, as scored by the Congressional Budget Office. The White House may agree to some form of work requirements in certain programs, but it will be a hard sell to secure support from Congressional Democrats.

Republicans appear in the driver's seat as of this afternoon, but Democrats have signaled a need for concessions, or compromise beyond agreeing to lift the debt limit, to ensure Democrats vote for the package. Negotiators do not appear close to a deal which could mean lawmakers go home for the Memorial Day recess or until a deal is reached.

With June 1<sup>st</sup> as the deadline to resolve this crisis, Congress must act swiftly and in a bipartisan manner to avoid seriously rattling the economy. We are closely following this situation and will report on developments as they occur.

### ON THE RADAR

#### **Sen. Cassidy Working On Dual Eligible Proposal**

Senator Bill Cassidy (LA), ranking member of the Senate HELP Committee, is seeking feedback on ways to reform health care for dual eligibles. Specifically, the senator unveiled a discussion draft to improve

care for dual eligibles through integrated care models, expanding the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), and a new risk adjustment model for integrated plans that cover duals, among other provisions.

The draft bill would direct states to choose an integrated care model to provide comprehensive care for full-benefit duals, as well as a model to provide partially integrated care for Medicare Savings Program-eligible beneficiaries. The draft would also require the CMS duals office and states to develop an outreach plan for Medicaid providers and collect data on provider network accessibility.

The draft would also require that states make PACE available to all eligible beneficiaries and expand the program to Medicare beneficiaries younger than 55. Please reach out if you have any questions.

### **ACL Unveils I/DD Counts Initiative Report**

Since 2016, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has worked with federal agencies and stakeholders to improve data collection to better understand how many people with I/DD live in the United States, their health status, and what are the drivers of their health status. Last fall, a summit was held bringing together stakeholders to discuss programs that will improve health outcomes for this population. Last week, ACL unveiled its report following the fall summit, which outlines key themes, takeaways, and next steps to promote improved health outcomes for individuals with disabilities over the coming decade. Please [click here](#) to view the report.

### **CMS Provides Guidance to Extend Telehealth Billing**

After the PHE ended, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) stated in guidance that hospital-employed physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and diabetes self-management training and medical nutrition therapy providers can continue billing CMS for telehealth services as they have during the pandemic through the end of this year. This change is beneficial for patients who will be able to receive care at home with minimal disruption. Associations are still waiting for more clarity for if this telehealth guidance will be extended to providers in skilled nursing facilities, rehabilitation agencies, and home health agencies. Please [click here](#) for more information on telehealth flexibilities and billing.

### **End of PHE Raises Questions for Future of HCBS**

The PHE allowed states to offer flexibilities to modify and strengthen Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to serve more beneficiaries. Examples of these flexibilities included expanding services like home delivered meals, access to medical supplies and equipment, and expanding allowable providers to include family caregivers. With the end of the PHE, many of these flexibilities will sunset by November 11, 2023. States will have the option to keep these flexibilities in place, but costs will challenge the continued access of these services.

Advocates continue to push for funding and program enhancements to strengthen the infrastructure for HCBS services, with support coalescing around the Better Care Better Jobs Act and the HCBS Access Act. It is not clear if aspects of either bill will be in the bipartisan Senate HELP Committee workforce package, which is expected to be unveiled in the coming weeks.

Please reach out if you have any questions.

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## **NIH-funded Study Highlights Economic Impact of Health Disparities**

New research from NIH shows the economic burden of health disparities has grown significantly over the past decade. The study found that in 2018 racial and ethnic health disparities cost the U.S. economy \$451 billion. The study results highlight how serious health disparities impact racial and ethnic minorities, and the consequences this has on the overall economy. You can read more about this study by [clicking here](#).

## **Visa Retrogression Undercuts Effort to Strengthen Health Workforce**

The State Department announced that it moved the cut-off date for visa eligibility to June 1, 2022. This means that those who filed petitions in the past year will not be able to proceed with their applications. The reduction on visas will have a ripple effect on the health care workforce shortage as international health care workers make up around 15 percent of the health workforce.

Currently, the US is facing a projected shortage of more than 200,000 nurses with reports saying that another 600,000 intend to leave the workforce by 2027 due to stress, burnout, or retirement. Stakeholders are hopeful that the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (HWRA) will be reintroduced in the coming weeks, which would recapture visas that were issued but unused from the previous year for the express use of nurses and doctors. The AHCA/NCAL also wrote a letter to Congress proposing a temporary visa option for health care occupations.

Supporters of HWRA in Congress hope that bipartisan immigration discussions to secure the border will also include proposals like this, which would help to address the shortage of nurses and physicians that was made worse by the pandemic.

## **CMS Announces NCD to Cover Seat Elevation Equipment for Power Wheelchairs**

After years of advocacy by various disability and aging organizations, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a national coverage decision (NCD) to cover seat elevation equipment. This is a win for the disability and aging communities as this equipment is critical for individuals who use them to perform everyday activities such as preparing food, getting dressed, and transferring to and from a wheelchair. The seat elevation equipment will be covered under the durable medical equipment (DME) benefit category and will be considered reasonable and necessary for an individual if certain conditions are met. For more information about this new coverage [click here](#).

## **ISSUE OF THE WEEK: What Do Career Pathways for Direct Care Workers Look Like?**

New research from Georgia State University looks at new ways to invest in the professional development of direct care workers. It is widely understood that low wages and reimbursement impair the recruitment and retention of workers, thus impacting access to services across the country. There are approximately 700,000 individuals on waitlists for HCBS, with the number expected to grow in the coming years.

This research explores the types of professional development opportunities that could be offered to direct care workers. These opportunities are intended to reflect the value and skills these workers have, promoting increased wages, a sustainable pipeline of direct care workers, and career advancement intended to promote continued access to services.

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The research highlights the funding increases proposed by the Biden Administration for HCBS in an effort to help visualize how this funding could be spent. It also presents opportunities for lawmakers in designing grant programs to reach more direct care worker organizations.

For more information on this report, please [click here](#).

## **ON THE HORIZON**

### **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is June 15<sup>th</sup>!**

During the week of June 15, 2023, The Administration for Community Living will be sharing resources, hosting discussions, and promoting awareness about elder abuse around the themes of:

- Interdisciplinary partnerships
- Intergenerational collaboration
- Intervention & prevention
- Intersectionality of elder abuse
- International elder justice efforts

To find out more information please [click here](#).

### **NADRC Webinar on Building Aging- and Dementia-Friendly Systems**

On Tuesday June 20, the National Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center will host a webinar that will teach participants about the age-friendly and the dementia-friendly health system movements, which are working to improve the health and well-being of older adults living with dementia and their families. The webinar will provide examples from the John A. Hartford Foundation and Maine Health. If you are interested in registering, please [click here](#).

### **Promoting Positive Employment Outcomes Among People with Disabilities Who Are Experiencing Long COVID Grant Opportunity**

The Administration for Community Living published a grant opportunity that focuses on the experience of people who have pre-existing disabilities and then also experience Long COVID. This grant is funding a review of prevalence of Long COVID among people with disabilities and research activities that look at factors related to risks, treatment, and supports for Long COVID. For more information [click here](#).

## **RECOMMENDED READS**

- *USA Today* – [Remote work: An underestimated benefit for family caregivers](#)
- *Long Beach Post* – [Can California find better paying jobs for people with disabilities?](#)
- *Chicago Tribute* – [Long-term care and inflation](#)

## **FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

As we pause this Memorial Day to reflect on the contributions of those who have died, we remember Judy Heumann and Bobby Silverstein.

They were icons in the disability community, always fighting for the rights of people with disabilities. From access to health care to securing an accessible ride to work, Bobby and Judy were the voices for equity for these populations.

We need to continue their efforts on behalf of vulnerable populations and ensure that current and future public policies reflect a commitment to equality, choice, and supporting vulnerable populations to be the best they can be.

Have a restful and reflective Memorial Day.

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

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