

EDITION: March 12, 2021



COVID-19 Resources

[HLB COVID-19 Resource Center](#)

Congressional

Congress Passes Additional COVID-19 Relief

Yesterday, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ([H.R. 1319](#)), which Congress passed along party lines earlier this week. The bill, costing over \$1.9 trillion, was passed before unemployment provisions were set to expire on March 14. The legislation includes an additional \$1,400 in stimulus payments to individuals earning income up to a certain threshold and extends unemployment benefits by an additional \$300 a week through September 6. By using budget reconciliation to pass the bill in the Senate, the final text was limited to provisions considered budgetary in nature, so larger policy provisions, such as increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, were not included in the final package. Although many health care groups advocated for key priorities, such as extending the moratorium of the 2% Medicare sequestration cuts, which currently ends March 31, and additional general provider relief – they were not included in this bill. The legislation provides additional COVID-19 funding for vaccination, testing, public health, and research among other things and included provisions expanding health coverage and lowering premiums for exchange plans, Medicaid, and COBRA.

Other Health Care Provisions ([for more](#)):

UPCOMING HEALTH CARE ACTIVITIES ON THE HILL

Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee

3/17 at 9:30am: [Executive Session](#) on Nominations for Vivek Murthy and Rachel Levine

3/18 at 10:00am: Full Committee [hearing](#) on Examining Our COVID-19 Response: An Update from Federal Officials.

Senate Finance Committee

3/17 at 10:00am: Full Committee [hearing](#) on A National Tragedy: COVID-19 in the Nation's Nursing Homes

House Energy & Commerce Committee

3/17 at 10:00am: Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee [hearing](#) on Leading the Way Forward: Biden Administration Actions to Increase COVID-19 Vaccinations

3/17 at 1:00pm: Health Subcommittee [hearing](#) on Averting a Crisis: Protecting Access to Health Care in the U.S. Territories

- Provides \$8.5 billion in additional provider relief funds for rural hospitals
- Removes the cap on Medicaid drug rebates starting in 2024
- Creates a Medicare area wage index for hospitals in all-urban states
- Allows Medicare to pay ambulance providers the same rate when it is not possible to take a patient to a Medicare-approved facility because of transportation limitations due to the PHE
- Provides \$500 million to deploy strike teams to help nursing home facilities manage COVID-19 outbreaks
- Provides \$200 million to HHS for the purpose of carrying out infection control support related to COVID-19 in skilled nursing facilities through quality improvement organizations

Administration

Regulatory Review Delays

As the Biden Administration continues its [review](#) of certain regulations released late in the Trump Administration, two additional rules have been formally delayed. Earlier this week, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [extended](#) the HIPAA Privacy Proposed Rule from March 22 to May 6, 2021. In addition, HHS further [delayed](#) the Implementation of Executive Order on Access to Affordable Life-Saving Medications Final Rule from its previous March 22 implementation deadline to July 20, 2021. The rule, which would require community health centers to pass on insulin and epinephrine discount savings to patients through the 340B program, will also be open to additional comment during this delay.

Biden Continues Health Care Nominations

As the Senate prepares to schedule its vote to confirm Xavier Becerra as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, additional health care appointments and confirmations have begun as well. The votes for Vivek Murthy as Surgeon General and Rachel Levine as Assistant Secretary of HHS are expected in the next week. Additionally, Chiquita Brooks-LaSure has been nominated as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Elizabeth Fowler has been appointed as the Deputy Administrator and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) Director.

New Guidance for Plans Covering COVID-19 Testing

On February 26, CMS released [updated guidance](#) requiring insurance plans to cover COVID-19 diagnostic testing without cost sharing. The FAQ addresses other health coverage issues related to COVID-19 and includes information about how

providers may seek federal reimbursement when delivering
COVID-19 related services to the uninsured.

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