



Welcome to *Washington Update*, the weekly e-newsletter on the latest health care happenings in the nation's capital that affect APG's members.

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### **As Trump's Health Team Takes Shape, So Does Upheaval In U.S. Health Policy**

Following President Trump's inauguration last Monday, the leadership that will formulate the Trump Administration's health policies and dramatically refocus federal health agencies continues to take shape.

- **Pre-confirmation hearings for Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services are now scheduled to begin on [Jan. 29](#) with the Senate Finance Committee. Committee member Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) has already sent Kennedy a [letter](#) with 75 questions, beginning with his opposition to vaccines. She and other lawmakers are also likely to probe issues raised in his [financial disclosure forms](#). As [reported](#) by CNN, these include his intention to retain a financial interest in certain personal injury lawsuits, including [one against Merck](#) over its human papilloma virus vaccine.

- Pending Kennedy's potential confirmation, **Dorothy Fink, MD, was [named Acting Secretary of HHS](#)**. Fink is director of the Office on Women's Health in in the Office of Assistant Secretary for Health and deputy assistant secretary for Women's Health. At the White House's direction, Fink promptly issued a "pause" through Feb. 1 on all external communications by federal health agencies – ranging from proposed regulations to news releases – with possible case-by-case involving matters of "critical health." Separate White House executive orders also [blocked](#) all federal rulemaking until a presidential appointee reviews any rule and [rescinded](#) multiple executive orders issued by the Biden Administration. Still another White House order indefinitely halted travel of all HHS personnel. *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that the pauses have led to "chaos" as meetings of outside scientists to review potential federal cancer research grants were among the many that have been cancelled.
- **Trump's White House health policy team** now includes [Theo Merkel](#) as special assistant to the president for domestic policy at the Domestic Policy Council and [Joel Zinberg](#) as special assistant to the president for economic policy at the National Economic Council. Both men have been associated with [Paragon Health Institute](#), a conservative health policy think tank.
- As Trump had already done once before, the administration also [announced](#) that the **United States would withdraw from the World Health Organization**, citing frustration that the nation is the United Nations-affiliated agency's largest donor. (Most of these contributions have been voluntary on America's part, according to the [MIT Technology Review](#).) The WHO [responded](#) that it regretted the decision, which could take a year to execute.



## **House Republicans Detail More Options For Major Cuts In Government Health Spending**

More [potential health care measures](#) are on House Republicans' menu of options for financing tax cuts and/or deficit reduction. In addition to major reforms in Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, these could include taxing nonprofit hospitals as for-profit entities to raise \$260 billion over a decade; reforming Graduate Medical Education payments for savings of up to \$85 billion over the same period; making unspecified reforms to the Medicare Physician Fee

Schedule to yield \$10 billion; and rescinding minimum nursing home staffing rules that the Biden Administration adopted last year.

According to news reports, some GOP lawmakers have pushed back on some options as leaders have tested out these proposals in meetings. *Politico* [reported](#) that centrist Republicans have raised objections to [proposed cuts](#) in the ACA, arguing that voter opposition could cause the GOP to lose control of the House in the 2025 midterm elections.

APG will continue to follow developments and advocate for members' interests as final legislative proposals take shape.



## **APG Member Groups Engaged In Risk Relationships With Medicare Advantage Plans Produce Superior Results For Patients, Study Shows**

Medicare Advantage (MA) patients cared for by 17 large APG physician groups experienced superior health outcomes when those groups were engaged in two-sided risk relationships with MA plans, according to a newly published [study](#). The study showed that, in 18 of 20 care domains measured, these patients fared better than patients cared for under fee-for-service relationships with MA plans.

As described in an APG [infographic](#), the study analyzed the care provided to more than 1 million patients annually over 2016-2019 by the 17 large groups and their more than 15,000 physicians. Patients cared for under at-risk arrangements were 8.7 percent less likely to undergo acute hospital admissions or visit emergency departments; from 8 to 22 percent less likely to be admitted to the hospital for chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure; and 15 percent less likely to have use of high-risk medications that could cause serious adverse events or death if used incorrectly. Because of the way these physician groups are paid by MA plans, they have more financial resources than groups paid on a fee-for-service basis by plans to devote to preventive care and to provide intensive case management programs, behavioral health care, pharmacy services, and other interventions that can keep patients as healthy as possible and out of the hospital.

In a [news release](#), APG noted that its member groups have pioneered in the creation of accountable relationships with MA plans in which they are at risk for quality and costs. “We think policymakers can now use these results to encourage and reward more MA plans and provider groups to form these close

partnerships and dramatically improve patient care,” said APG President and Chief Executive Officer Susan Dentzer.



## In Case You Missed It

- The battle over 2025 revisions in Star Ratings continued as the **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid [appealed a federal court's decision](#)** ordering it to calculate United Healthcare's ratings.
- United Health Group named [Tim Noel](#), who has led United Healthcare's Medicare business, to take the place of murdered Brian Thompson as **the new CEO of UHG's insurance division.**



## APG Announcements And Offerings

- APG will host a **Learning Session Webinar** to discuss the Medicare Advantage 2026 Advance Notice on **Wednesday, January 29, 12:00-1:00 pm ET**. You can register for the webinar [here](#). APG will also host a members-only **Focus Group meeting** on **Tuesday, February 4, 12:00-1:00 pm ET**, to solicit feedback about the MA 2026 Advance Notice. MA Coalition members should watch for an email with a registration link.
- APG will host an **Emerging Trends in Health Care Webinar** on **Wednesday, February 12, 2:00 pm – 2:45 pm ET**, with guest [Seema Verma](#), Executive Vice President and General Manager of Oracle Health and Life Sciences, and former administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Register for the webinar [here](#).
- Registration is now open for the [APG Spring Conference 2025](#) — **Kickstarting Accountable Care: Innovations for an Urgent Future, May 14-16, in San Diego, CA**. APG Members who register by February 14 save \$300 with the Super Early Bird rate. APG Partners and non-members save up to \$200 with regular Early Bird registration that ends March 14. Groups of 5 or more that register together receive an additional \$50 savings per registrant. **New this year: bundle your savings!** All APG Spring Conference 2025 registrants will have an opportunity to register for the APG Fall Conference 2025 at the lowest price of the year, with discounts up to \$400. Simply follow the link on your Spring Conference confirmation e-mail to register for Fall now!

- Sponsorship is open for the **APG Spring Conference 2025**, May 14-16, in San Diego. Visit our [Spring Conference 2025 sponsor website](#) and reserve your space today!
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).

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