



August 8, 2025

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

Table of Contents

- **Preventive Care Panel Members May Face Termination, Kennedy Admits, Threatening Established Order Of Prevention Science And Coverage**
- **Vaccines Shakeup Continues As HHS Cuts mRNA Research Funding, Bars Medical Groups' Role In Advisory Process, And More**
- **In Case You Missed It**
- **APG Announcements And Offerings**



Preventive Care Panel Members May Face Termination, Kennedy Admits, Threatening Established Order Of Prevention Science And Coverage

The status quo that has long governed review and recommendation of preventive services stands to be upended if Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. follows through on dismissing all 16 members of the [US Preventive Services Task Force \(USPSTF\)](#). Kennedy [said](#) this week that he was "reviewing" firing the advisory panel that makes evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services following a *Wall Street Journal* [report](#) in late July that Kennedy views the task force as too "woke" (an apparent reference to task force recommendations that refer to ["pregnant persons."](#)) The task force grades preventive services along five grade levels based on the strength of the scientific evidence behind them; under the Affordable Care Act, those rated [top – A or B –](#) in at least four

categories, including immunizations with vaccines, [must be covered](#) by health insurers with no cost sharing.

Panel integrity: Although Kennedy has clear authority to appoint task force members under a recent Supreme Court decision ([Washington Update – June 27, 2025](#)), the threat has sparked deep concern among some [members of Congress](#) and many physician and other health care groups, who fear that the panel could be reconfigured with members more aligned with Kennedy's [unconventional](#) and non-science-based views. More than 100 organizations [urged](#) lawmakers to ensure the task force's integrity, and the American Medical Association [asked](#) Kennedy directly to maintain the existing panel. APG shares these organizations' perspectives and has raised them with congressional staff, largely out of concern that stable provision and coverage of evidence-based preventive services is core to the success of value-based health care.

Created under the Reagan administration in 1984, the congressionally authorized task force is charged with focusing on preventive services offered in primary care settings or referable by a primary care clinician. [Panel members](#), all volunteers, come from a broad range of expertise and practice; the current [chair](#), Michael Silverstein, MD, MPH, is a pediatrician and professor at the Brown University School of Public Health who focuses on mental health services for children. Members serve four-year terms, and "are screened to ensure that they have no substantial conflicts of interest that could impair the scientific integrity of the Task Force's work," according to the USPSTF's website.



Vaccines Shakeup Continues As HHS Cuts mRNA Research Funding, Bars Medical Groups' Role In Advisory Process, And More

In a major blow to pandemic preparedness and vaccine development, Secretary Kennedy this week [canceled](#) 22 research projects and nearly \$500 million in grants supporting development of mRNA-based vaccines, the platform on which most successful COVID vaccines have been based. The move followed steps to [exclude](#) many health care and medical groups – including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics – from roles in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccine advisory process, as well as Secretary Kennedy's [vow to "fix" the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program \(VICIP\)](#), the federal entity that simultaneously reduces manufacturers' liability for harm and facilitates more rapid compensation than via lawsuits for people injured by vaccines.

The moves and threats drew sharp rebukes all around. Kennedy justified the decision to cancel mRNA vaccine research funding

by [claiming](#) that the vaccines do not provide effective protection against respiratory illnesses such as COVID and flu, despite [estimates](#) that COVID vaccines averted more than 3 million deaths in the United States from 2020-2022 alone, and the fact that [strong results](#) have been reported for at least one mRNA candidate flu vaccine. Kennedy also asserted, falsely, that a single viral mutation can render an mRNA-based vaccine ineffective. Jerome Adams, MD, President Trump's first-term surgeon general, said the decision would "[cost lives](#)," while prominent epidemiologist Michael Osterholm [described](#) the cancellation of mRNA research as the "most dangerous public health decision I have ever seen made by a government body." Other scientists [warned](#) that the move would leave the nation more vulnerable not only to a future pandemic, but also to bioterrorism.

Health groups ban: The CDC's separate notification that multiple organizations were being removed from 11 [work groups](#) supporting the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices effectively bars most physician organizations with expertise in the field from a role in the ACIP's consultative processes. An HHS spokesperson said in a [statement](#) that the removals occurred because the organizations involved were "plagued by conflicts of interest, influence, and bias." (Multiple APG members also belong to the barred organizations, such as the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the AMA). Kennedy has already reconstituted the ACIP itself with new members that include prominent vaccine opponents ([Washington Update – June 13, 2025](#)), so this latest step only heightens concerns that science and expertise is being devalued in favor of anti-vaccine sentiment – a concern that APG also shares.

Kennedy's vow to overhaul the VCIP program also reflects the long-held views of vaccine opponents that the construct overly insulates vaccine manufacturers from liability and doesn't provide enough compensation from those injured, regardless of the evidence that vaccines caused a particular harm. In a [post](#) on X, Kennedy wrote that the program is "broken" and accused federal lawyers and adjudicators who run VCIP of "inefficiency, favoritism and outright corruption." "There are improvements needed to the program," [wrote](#) Dorit Reiss, PhD, a law professor at the University of California Law, San Francisco, in a blog post, but she added that what Kennedy really wants is "to serve the anti-vaccine agenda by making the program compensate cases not caused by the vaccines."



In Case You Missed It

- Three new APG [issue briefs](#) aimed at [physician groups](#), [health plans](#), and [state policymakers](#) detail how stakeholders can help

to transform care for California's 1.7 million dually eligible individuals under a state initiative to encourage their enrollment in "aligned" D-SNP and Medicaid managed care plans.

- The CDC quietly endorsed the seasonal influenza vaccine for everyone six months and older in a [recommendation](#) dating from June that appeared on ACIP's website this week.
- Congress needs to act by the end of August to extend the ACA's enhanced premium tax credits for 2026 to give insurers and states enough time to accurately set rates for next year, given that expiration of the credits would lead to [higher premiums](#), according to the American Academy of Actuaries.
- States can begin applying in early September for portions of the \$50 billion rural health stabilization fund included in HR 1 to offset cuts to Medicaid, CMS administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, [said](#) this week.
- Major drug companies must make "binding commitments" to lower prescription drug costs to comparable international prices within 60 days or face tariffs as high as 250 percent, President Trump [said](#) in letters sent to CEOs of 17 of the biggest US drug companies.
- Aetna [announced](#) it will end 90 Medicare Advantage plans across 34 states in 2026. The announcement follows a similar move by UnitedHealthcare last week to end MA plans for more than 600,000 people.
- The Trump administration delayed a proposed rule change on Medicare coverage of skin substitutes after the founder of ExtremityCare, a leading producer, gave \$5 million to President Trump, the New York Times [reported](#).



APG Announcements And Offerings

- Registration is now open for the **APG Fall Conference 2025 - Purpose, Perseverance and Possibility: Staying the Course on Accountable Care, November 5-7 in National Harbor, MD**, near Washington, DC. **Register by Friday, August 22**, save up to \$300 with our Super-Early Bird registration.
- APG will host a Group Purchasing Program webinar featuring **Accorded, MedicareOnDemand, Plannery, and Sparx on Wednesday, August 20, 2:00 pm – 3:00pm ET**. Register for the webinar [here](#).
- APG will host a **Members-Only focus group on the 2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule & MSSP Proposed**

Rule on Thursday, August 21, 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm ET. To register, please email Jenifer Callahan at jcallahan@apg.org.

- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today.](#)

Know people who may enjoy receiving *Washington Update*? Forward this email and have them contact communications@apg.org to be added to the subscription list. Visit APG's [website](#) for more news and resources, or contact communications@apg.org.