



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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Trump Administration's Vaccines War Joins Its Anti-Autism Crusade

In what could be the crowning achievement of a longstanding anti-vaccines lawyer, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr, plans to enter children with autism spectrum disorder into the [National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program](#), the *Politico Pro* newsletter [reported](#) today. The effort would presumably be predicated on the scientifically disproven belief that vaccines cause autism – a theme [repeated](#) this week by President Trump. If the effort to remake the vaccine injury compensation program succeeded, awards to children with autism would exhaust its entire \$4 billion in financial resources, according to the *Politico Pro* report.

The news capped an extraordinary week that began with the President and other administration officials warning pregnant women – and all children – not to take Tylenol (acetaminophen), invoking “limited, conflicting, and inconsistent science” around the drug’s link to autism, as one autism organization said in a [statement](#). Amid broad condemnation from multiple medical and autism organizations, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) later [clarified](#) that no causal relationship between acetaminophen and autism has been established and stopped short of recommending a ban during pregnancy – although the agency also said it would update the drug’s label to suggest the link. And in yet another step that drew broad [criticism](#), the FDA announced it would [initiate approval](#) for the drug leucovorin, a treatment for a form of folate deficiency that can lead to “developmental delays with autistic features,” the agency said.

“Unhinged:” The tidal wave of pseudo-science left many medical experts and public health leaders aghast. “In some respects, this was the most unhinged discussion of autism that I have ever listened to,” Helen Tager-Flusberg, PhD, founder of the Coalition of Autism Scientists, [told](#) the *New York Times* following the President’s rambling news conference about the autism initiatives. Other experts [said](#) the anti-acetaminophen guidance would leave millions of women and expectant parents confused and could cause more harm if high fevers in pregnant women went untreated. And although a federal district court judge last year dismissed lawsuits brought by parents of children with autism against Kenvue, Tylenol’s manufacturer, citing lack of reliable scientific evidence, new court [filings](#) by plaintiffs’ attorneys citing Trump’s views suggest that litigation could continue.

APG continues to condemn the administration’s efforts to foment distrust and avoidance of recommended vaccines; the enormous costs it will impose due to lack of effective prevention; the avoidable illness and death that will result; and the growing public health threat to the nation.



Prospect Of Partial Government Shutdown Uncertain Amid White House Threat Of Mass Agency Layoffs

The Trump administration’s latest cudgel against congressional Democrats is the threat of massive new reductions in force across federal agencies if Congress fails to pass a government funding deal by next week’s deadline. According to a [memo](#) obtained by *Politico*, the Office of Management and Budget is ordering agencies to identify discretionary “programs, projects, or activities” whose funding has lapsed and which are “not consistent with the President’s priorities.”

The looming showdown centers on Democrats' [demand](#) that Republicans agree to permanently extend the [enhanced Affordable Care Act \(ACA\) premium tax credits](#) and reverse [Medicaid cuts](#) before they will support a continuing resolution (CR) to extend funding through Nov. 21. The House earlier passed a “clean” CR with no such measures beyond the fiscal 2025 funding extension with only Republican votes ([Washington Update - September 19, 2025](#)). But advancing the measure in the Senate will require some Democratic votes, and no apparent compromise is yet in sight.

Uncertainties: If a government shutdown results as of October 1, multiple [health care programs](#) of interest to APG members could be affected, including reauthorization and funding for community health centers; the Acute Hospital Care at Home waiver authorities; and Medicare telehealth flexibilities. It is unclear whether affected services delivered during any shutdown would receive retroactive payment. APG continues to seek clarity in its discussions with congressional staff.



Federal Risk Adjustment Audits Of Medicare Advantage Plans Potentially Under Threat From Judge’s Ruling

A Texas federal district court’s [decision](#) this week throwing out a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ (CMS) [rule](#) adopted in 2023 is raising questions about the agency’s current [plan](#) for stepped-up Medicare Advantage plan audits – a centerpiece of its efforts to crack down on waste, fraud, and abuse in government health programs.

The court’s ruling invalidates certain methodological changes that CMS adopted for conducting Risk Adjustment Data Validation (RADV) audits and levying any penalties on MA plans. Health insurer Humana had sued CMS, alleging that the agency’s alteration of the methodology and issuance of the 2023 rule was “arbitrary and capricious” and unduly penalized plans subject to the audits. The agency has altered the RADV methodology under successive administrations, with the latest set of changes issued under the Biden administration. But the court decision will now leave the current CMS to either appeal the Texas court’s decision or revise the methodology further to continue its more aggressive auditing efforts.

APG has endorsed the stepped-up RADV audits as a means of cracking down on illegal risk adjustment overcoding and shoring up trust in the MA program.



In Case You Missed It

- Details of a “most favored nation” pilot program proposed by the CMS Innovation Center are likely to be published soon, as pharmaceutical manufacturers face a Sept. 29 Trump administration deadline “to voluntarily align U.S. drug prices with those in other developed countries,” *Inside Health Policy* [reported](#).
- Also according to [Inside Health Policy](#), the administration is exploring creation of “TrumpRx,” a new direct-to-consumer prescription drug discount website, mimicking a drug discount card effort pioneered under President George W. Bush.
- A [measles outbreak](#) is growing in parts of Arizona and Utah, where measles vaccine rates have plummeted in the last 10 years. Of the 23 cases among Utah schoolchildren, all but one are unvaccinated.
- Despite the administration’s earlier effort to kill the HeadStart program ([Washington Update - April 18, 2025](#)), HHS is now [directing](#) \$62 million to the program to support nutrition for more than 100,000 children and families.
- A new [KFF brief](#) details more than a dozen factors that will be considered by CMS when determining awards for the \$50 billion rural health fund created in H.R. 1.
- Low public support and lawmakers’ desire to redirect attention away from health care cuts to tax cuts has led Republicans [to stop referring](#) to H.R. 1 as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” and instead call it the “Working Families Tax Cut Act.”
- Ben Carson, retired neurosurgeon and former HUD Secretary during Trump’s first term, was [sworn in](#) as nutrition, health care, and housing adviser at the Department of Agriculture.
- Even higher tariffs on medical devices, equipment, and personal protective equipment could be coming as the Commerce Department [announced](#) new security investigations into the import of these materials.
- A simple [guide](#) for health care leaders to understand recent [recommendations](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding COVID vaccines has been published by the [Common Health Coalition](#).



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. **Please register by the end of the day today, Friday, September 26**, to save up to \$200 with Early Bird registration.
- APG will host two upcoming sponsored webinars:
 - "Rewriting the Dementia Playbook: A Value-Based Blueprint for Brain Health," presented by Linus Health, on Thursday, October 2, at 3:00pm ET. [Register here](#).
 - "Bridging the Gap: Integrating Behavioral Health Into Evernorth Primary Care," Presented by evolvedMD, on Tuesday October 14, at 4:00pm ET. [Register here](#).
- APG will host a member-only focus group on the Federal Trade Commission's non-compete [RFI](#) on October 9, at 4:00pm ET. To register, please email Jenifer Callahan at jcallahan@apg.org.
- APG has partnered with **Champions for Vaccine Education, Equity and Progress (CVEEP)** to assist with vaccine outreach and education to patients during the upcoming respiratory virus season. Please access tailored materials for APG members [here](#).
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).

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