



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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Anger Over CDC Shake-Up And Recent Vaccine Moves Dominate Senate Hearing

Senators from both parties tore into Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. at a [hearing](#) this week over shifts in vaccine policy and the recent ouster of the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As Kennedy pushed back, several lawmakers accused him of lying and demanded his resignation, and others took pains to expose his apparent lack of knowledge in critical health policy areas – including about [how many Americans](#)

[died](#) during the COVID pandemic, and how many the vaccines probably saved.

The Senate Finance Committee hearing was scheduled to hear Kennedy discuss his proposed fiscal 2026 budget for HHS and plans for departmental reorganization. But he ended up mainly having to defend his frequent opposition to vaccines and his overhaul of the CDC. He said that the ousted former director, Susan Monarez, MD, was “untrustworthy,” and at one point, appeared to blame the agency alone for Americans’ comparatively poor health. “They did not do their job,” he said. “This was their job to keep us healthy.”

Skepticism: Several Republicans on the panel were having none of it. “I don’t see how you go over four weeks from a public health expert with unimpeachable scientific credentials, a long-time champion of [Make America Healthy Again] values ... and four weeks later, fire her because she refused to fire people that work for her,” said Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC). Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), who ultimately voted to confirm Kennedy after receiving commitments from the Secretary to preserve vaccine access ([Washington Update – February 7, 2025](#)), called out Kennedy’s inaccurate statements on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine and the effect of the Food and Drug Administration’s recent decision to restrict indications for the new COVID booster shots ([Washington Update - August 29, 2025](#)). The mass confusion that has resulted – with large pharmacy chains [pulling back](#) on administering the shots without prescriptions in multiple states – means that “effectively, we’re denying people vaccines,” Cassidy said. “You’re wrong,” shot back Kennedy, with no further explanation.

The sharp exchanges echoed growing concerns in the health care and public health community. Nine former CDC directors recently called for Kennedy’s resignation in a *New York Times* [column](#), and more than 1,000 HHS employees signed a [letter](#) urging Kennedy to step down. Following the hearing, President Trump [said](#) that he was confident that Kennedy “means very well” but acknowledged that “he’s got some little different ideas.”



Turmoil On Vaccine Policy Grows As States Go Separate Ways And Some Regulators Throw More Fuel On The Fire

The ongoing turmoil over vaccine policy deepened across the nation this week, as some states embraced wildly different public health strategies amid new bombshells from key government regulators and advisors. Meanwhile, within government, purges over vaccine attitudes continued.

Splits among states: Citing concerns over a compromised CDC and “politicized science,” California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington [announced](#) that they had formed a new coalition to provide evidence-based immunization recommendations to their state residents. In a joint statement, the governors of all four states said that their new “Western Health Alliance” will “allow residents to receive consistent, science-based recommendations they can rely on — regardless of shifting federal actions.” Meanwhile, Florida took the opposite tack, as the state’s governor and [surgeon general](#) announced that the state would end all vaccine mandates, including existing [requirements](#) for children attending schools. The Florida Medical Association quickly [condemned](#) the plan, which may also face challenges in the state legislature, which must approve the measure.

Child vaccines overhaul: A new [report](#) in *Inside Health Policy* quotes [Robert Malone](#), one of the new anti-vaccine members of the reconstituted CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices as affirming that the group will “reexamine the entire childhood vaccine schedule, with an underlying view that children receive too many vaccines,” at its forthcoming meeting later this month.

More FDA controversy: Along with HHS’s Kennedy, the FDA’s top vaccine regulator, Vinay Prasad, reportedly continues to stir vaccine doubts and overrule or purge those who disagree with him. The *New York Times* [reported](#), based on memos it reviewed, that Prasad had overruled the agency’s staff scientists in narrowing the indications for new COVID booster shots and restricting them for young children. The *Washington Post* [reported](#) that Prasad also questioned the safety of administering flu and COVID vaccines together despite years of federal guidance and multiple studies, and announced that FDA will require “new clinical trials before allowing pharmaceutical companies to claim that co-administering multiple respiratory virus vaccines is safe and effective.” And [Paul Offit, MD](#), a noted children’s vaccine expert and frequent critic of Kennedy’s vaccine policies, was [removed](#) from his position this week as a member of FDA’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee.

NIH woes: A prominent infectious disease expert at the National Institutes of Health filed a federal whistleblower [complaint](#) alleging that she was sidelined over disagreements about vaccines and grants cancellations. Jeanne Marrazzo, MD, MPH, served as director of NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) from August 2023 until her involuntary removal last March. She had succeeded Anthony Fauci, MD, who had served as NIAID’s Director for 38 years.



Once Again, Appropriations Battle Looms Just Three Weeks Before Funding Deadline

Setting up a potential collision with the Senate, the House Appropriations Committee this week advanced a fiscal 2026 [appropriations bill](#) that would cut funding for HHS by 6 percent below 2025 levels. Although far less a cut than the Trump administration earlier [proposed](#), the House's numbers are well below the Senate's proposed 26 percent increase in HHS's budget ([Washington Update – August 1, 2025](#)). Congress has until September 30 to pass bills to fund the government and avoid a shutdown — unless it once again adopts a [continuing resolution](#) to extend fiscal 2025 funding temporarily.

The House measure includes deep cuts to several HHS agencies, including the CDC, and would once again move to eliminate the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

In one area of alignment with the Senate, the House also rejected Trump administration plans to drastically slash the NIH budget and consolidate agencies – proposing to fund the agency at a \$400 million increase over 2025 levels and to retain all 27 NIH institutes and centers. It would also limit indirect costs on NIH grants to 30 percent of federal awards – well above the administration's proposed 15 percent cap, but in stark contrast to the Senate plan, which rejected any cap and instead endorsed a new [model](#) developed by universities to calculate those costs.



Expanded Eligibility For Catastrophic Coverage May Provide Option For Some Consumers

As millions of enrollees in Affordable Care Act health plans face higher premiums and potential loss of [enhanced premium tax credits](#), HHS [announced](#) that it will expand eligibility for [catastrophic health coverage](#) to certain individuals ineligible for other forms of assistance under the ACA. Specifically, those whose incomes or other circumstances make them ineligible for advance payments of the [premium tax credit](#) (APTC) or [cost-sharing reductions](#) (CSRs) will now be able to buy catastrophic coverage even if their incomes exceed

250 percent of the [federal poverty level](#), or about \$80,000 for a family of four.

Serving dual purposes? The newly announced policy could provide an affordable alternative for those who may lose enhanced subsidies when they expire, or who currently don't qualify for the other forms of financial assistance under the ACA. But critics fear that it could have the effect of drawing people out of more generous [“silver” or other “metal-tiered”](#) ACA plans and into barer-bones plans, potentially further destabilizing the ACA plan markets.

Measured in terms of [“actuarial value”](#) – the total average costs of health benefits that the various types of plans must cover – catastrophic plans cover less than 60 percent of those expenses, the threshold for the lowest metal-level “bronze” plans. Deductibles on catastrophic plans are scheduled to rise to [no more than \\$10,600](#) for a single individual in 2026, offering scant protection until consumers face very high health care expenses.



In Case You Missed It

- Approximately 2.3 million people improperly claimed premium tax credits through the Affordable Care Act marketplace in 2025, according to a new [CBO analysis](#) requested by House Republicans. CBO also said that ACA changes in recently enacted reconciliation legislation and federal regulation will reduce the number of improper tax credit claims.
- Applications for funding from the CMS Rural Health Transformation (RHT) program created in the reconciliation law will be available in mid-September, according to a new CMS [website](#).
- House lawmakers at a [hearing](#) this week shared a cautious enthusiasm for the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in health care, while expressing concerns about AI chatbots' effects on youth mental health.



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**, September 26, to save up to \$200 with our 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 evolvedMO, on Tuesday October 14, at 4:00pm ET. [Register here](#).
- APG has partnered with **Champions for Vaccine Education, Equity and Progress (CVEEP)** to provide APG members with consumer-facing materials to assist with vaccine outreach and education in patient communications 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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