



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

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No Meeting Of The Minds Over ACA Tax Credit Extension Clouds Prospects For Action

Post-shutdown hopes dimmed this week for any near-term congressional agreement to extend the Affordable Care Act's [enhanced premium tax credits](#) (EPTCs) amid wide differences among lawmakers over their preferred approaches. The disagreements also cast doubt over prospects for an end-of-year health care package and fueled competing partisan visions for broader health reforms next year.

Even as Democrats and some moderate House Republicans have called again for extending the EPTCs, which will expire at year's end, President Trump and many other Republicans back rival plans to effectively convert the credits into funds that would be deposited in [flexible spending accounts](#) (FSAs) or [Health Savings Accounts](#) (HSAs). Money deposited into such tax-advantaged accounts could then be used by consumers to pay for a range of medical expenses,

but generally not for health insurance premiums. Most of the GOP proposals lack specifics at this point, and it is unclear how much they would help consumers who now face on average a doubling of their ACA plan premiums as the EPTCs expire. Democrats have decried them as “an excuse to gut health insurance,” as a [minority report](#) from the Senate Finance Committee declared this week. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners also [warned](#) lawmakers this week that failure to extend the EPTCs will disrupt ACA insurance markets “with higher premiums, insurer exits, and steep expected declines in enrollment,” particularly among younger and healthier enrollees.

Widening chasm? The lack of consensus casts doubt over whether there will be sufficient momentum to pass a year-end health package that could include other priorities, such as pharmacy benefit management [reform](#) or more shifts to [site-neutral payments](#) in Medicare. Meanwhile, the parties appear to be even further apart on broader health care reforms now being discussed for next year. The Trump administration and some House Republicans are [contemplating](#) trying to pass another reconciliation bill on a party-line vote that would further remake the ACA and tackle other priorities, including a massive defense spending increase. But the tight timetable of an election year and the [thin House GOP margin](#) could make such a process difficult to achieve, even as Democrats seem likely to make major cuts in Medicaid and other Republican health care policies a preeminent campaign issue.

APG will continue to advocate for extension of the EPTCs, potentially with some income caps on who can claim the credits, in the interests of maintaining the broadest possible health insurance coverage amid stable ACA markets. Among items in any year-end health package, APG has prioritized incorporation of a permanent automatic adjustment for practice cost inflation into the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule along the lines recently [proposed](#) by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC).



With CDC Website Tweak, Trump Administration Continues To Foster Belief That Vaccines Cause Autism

APG joined the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and more than 40 other medical and public health groups this week in denouncing the Trump administration’s latest move to cast doubt on vaccines by stating on the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention's [website](#) that science hasn't disproven that vaccines cause autism.

As widely [reported](#), although the agency's website has long proclaimed that "Vaccines do not cause Autism," it was amended this week to say that "The claim 'vaccines do not cause autism' is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism." The amended statement, which flies in the face of more than 40 international [studies showing no such link](#), appeared to be a further attempt to cast fatal doubt on vaccine safety. As previously reported ([Washington Update, September 26, 2025](#)), Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a leading proponent of the vaccines-cause-autism conspiracy, has drawn up plans to enter children with autism spectrum disorder into the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. If successful, the move would exhaust the fund's \$4 billion in financial resources and potentially open the door to countless lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers, possibly forcing them to withdraw from the market.

Stop the Madness: Condemnation of the CDC website change has been widespread. "We call on the CDC to stop wasting government resources to amplify false claims that sow doubt in one of the best tools we have to keep children healthy and thriving: routine immunizations," said the AAP statement to which APG signed on. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), a physician and chair of a [key Senate health panel](#) who said he voted to confirm Kennedy after [securing assurances](#) that Kennedy would not dismantle the nation's vaccine safety systems or take down government vaccine guidance, wrote on X that "What parents need to hear right now is vaccines for measles, polio, hepatitis B and other childhood diseases are safe and effective and will not cause autism. Any statement to the contrary is wrong, irresponsible, and actively makes Americans sicker."

Close sources tell APG that vaccine scientists at CDC now feel "blindsided" and "pretty traumatized by the fact that this distortion has been released under the CDC moniker." The episode comes amid mounting evidence that vaccine confidence is declining among selected groups of Americans, often along political lines, according to a [new Pew Research survey](#). Although 63 percent of Americans in the survey said that they were "highly confident" that childhood vaccines are effective at preventing serious illness, smaller shares (53 percent) believe that the vaccines have undergone enough safety testing or that the existing vaccine schedule is safe (51 percent). Whereas Democratic support for vaccines remains consistently high, self-identified Republicans are less inclined than previously to believe that the benefits of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine outweigh the risks. Whereas 91 percent of Republicans believed that in 2016, says Pew,

only 78 percent believe that today, and only 52 percent support MMR vaccine school requirements.



In Case You Missed It

- **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, MBA, [told](#)** state Medicaid directors at their conference this week that large cuts in Medicaid spending made in [H.R. 1](#) would “save” the program for low-income people. His remarks followed CMS’s release on Nov. 14 of [preliminary guidance](#) on the **law’s changes to provider taxes and state-directed payment programs** designed to “generally prohibit new or increased” levies in these categories. The CMS guidance takes special aim at California and New York for using these features to “inappropriately [shift] the financing burden [of Medicaid] to the federal government.” The Congressional Budget Office calculated that overall, the provider tax and SDP changes will lead to gross federal Medicaid spending cuts of \$225.7 billion over ten years and [increase](#) the number of uninsured people by 1.2 million by 2034, Georgetown University’s Center for Children and Families notes in an [analysis](#).
- A new [workaround](#) **provided by CMS for providers of Medicare telehealth services** will enable them to suppress their home addresses in provider directories and other public sources if they are providing telehealth from their homes. The workaround addresses the fact that the agency’s previous policies regarding nondisclosure of this information were not continued in the legislation ending the recent government shutdown.
- **Standard Medicare Part B premiums** will rise from \$185.00 in 2025 to \$202.90 in 2026, an increase of \$17.90 per month, or approximately 9.7%, CMS said this week in [announcing](#) premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance amounts for the Medicare Part A and Part B programs and 2026 Medicare Part D income-related adjustments. The Part B deductible will rise from \$257 to \$283, or about 10 percent. About 8 percent of Part D enrollees will have to pay monthly income adjustments for their coverage ranging from \$14.50 to \$91.00.
- **Clinicians can be paid \$20-\$25 every six months for five- to 15-minute standardized assessments of physical activity and nutrition** under the new Medicare physician fee schedule [rule](#) for 2026. The service can be included in evaluation and management, behavioral health, and annual

wellness visits.

- **HHS will soon release a new plan for health-related artificial intelligence**, according to news reports, replacing a plan that the former Biden administration unveiled last January. HHS also [announced](#) a new \$2 million Caregiver Artificial Intelligence Prize Competition “to support the [1 in 4 Americans](#) serving as caregivers for older adults and people with disabilities.” The moves come as the Trump administration also [pushes to block](#) state-level laws and regulations to hold companies accountable for harms caused by AI products, *Modern Healthcare* reports.
- **An [analysis](#) of Medicare Shared Savings Plan ACOs** by Duke-Margolis Institute and other researchers newly published in *Health Affairs* says that the 476 participating ACOs generated more than \$2.4 billion in net savings for Medicare in 2024, or \$241 per attributed beneficiary. The majority of these ACOs are now taking downside risk (67 percent). Physician-led ACOs continue to be “more likely to earn shared savings” compared to hospital-led ACOs “due to strong financial incentives to reduce hospitalizations.”



APG Announcements And Offerings

- **Washington Update will not publish next Friday, Nov. 28, due to the Thanksgiving holiday.**
- Sponsorship is now open for the **APG Spring Conference 2026, May 27-29, in San Diego**. Visit our [Spring Conference 2026 sponsor website](#) and reserve your space today!
- **Missed the APG Fall Conference? Purchase full recordings of key sessions and panels!** You can access **on-demand videos** of the **General Sessions** and **audio recordings** of the **Breakout Sessions**, featuring some of the most timely and insightful discussions in health care today. For a full overview of the sessions featured in the recordings, visit our agenda [here](#).
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