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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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## **CMS's Renewed Accountable Care Blitz In Traditional Medicare Welcomed By APG**

In a renewed push toward more accountable care in traditional Medicare, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) this week highlighted its newest ACO entry, its foray into new tech-driven supports for chronically ill Medicare beneficiaries, and a mandatory nationwide [expansion](#) of the Comprehensive Joint Replacement (CJR) model – the latter aimed at further transforming hospital care for hip, knee, and ankle replacements, among the most common and costly surgical procedures performed annually in the United States.

**Taking the LEAD:** In a launch event for the new [Long-Term Enhanced ACO Design \(LEAD\) model](#), CMS administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, MBA, described the new [total costs of care](#) model as the antidote for lagging growth in traditional Medicare's ACOs. "Fee-for-service Medicare should not be the way we deliver care to most people, because it's not as good as the value-based care systems" more typical of certain Medicare Advantage arrangements, he said at the event, which was co-hosted by APG and other organizations focused on value-based care or rural and community health. As previously reported in [Washington Update](#) (Dec. 19, 2025), the LEAD model aims to support organizations transitioning out of the ACO REACH model, which will end this year, as well as draw in more independent physicians and rural practices. It also offers new [incentives](#) for beneficiaries to formally affiliate themselves with the new ACOs, providing an extra form of accountability that APG has long [recommended](#) for traditional Medicare.

**Expanding ACCESS:** [More than 150 organizations](#) – most of them technology-focused companies new to providing services to Medicare patients – will participate in the [Advancing Chronic Care with Effective, Scalable Solutions \(ACCESS\)](#) model, which is scheduled to launch in July, CMS also announced this week. Despite concerns about the relatively low outcomes-based payments for model participants, many of the organizations applied for two or more of the [clinical tracks](#) in the model. CMS has extended the deadline for applications to May 15 in hopes of drawing in even more participants, which so far include a very small number of conventional health care providers. APG will feature a special session on the ACCESS model at its forthcoming spring conference in San Diego on May 28.

**Joint Effort:** Building on the success of the [original CJR model](#), which ran from 2016-2024, CMS late last week [proposed](#) CJR-X, billed as the first nationwide test of a mandatory [episode-based payment](#) model. Although the original CJR model prompted huge changes in the delivery of [lower-extremity joint replacement](#) procedures – shifting most of them to the outpatient setting for the first time – CMS says lack of care coordination before and after surgery is still leading to complications or prolonged recovery for patients. As proposed, CJR-X would hold designated acute-care hospitals that are not engaged in the [Transforming Episode Accountability \(TEAM\)](#) model – or that are not conducting and billing for care as an [Ambulatory Surgical Center](#) – fully responsible for associated care and spending during and after discharge for 90 days. APG welcomes the proposal and expects it to help forge even tighter linkages between hospitals and APG's member physician groups to improve patients' outcomes and reduce avoidable spending.



## **U.S. Public Health Policy Stays On Erratic Course With New CDC Director Nominee And Fresh Kennedy Overhaul Plans**

The nation's public health policies appeared likely to remain on a one-step-forward, multiple-steps-backward path this week – first, amid the positive signal of a new nominee to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and second, amid [congressional testimony](#) from Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that the newsletter *PoliticoPro* described as producing “head-turning” clashes with lawmakers over a wide range of issues.

In moving at last to nominate a new CDC director, [Erica Schwartz, MD, MPH, JD](#), the Trump administration appeared eager to stabilize the beleaguered agency ([Washington Update](#), March 27, 2026) and put the worst of Kennedy's politically unpopular vaccines battles behind it. Schwartz is a former deputy surgeon general, longtime member of the U.S. Public Health Service commissioned corps, and veteran of multiple public health campaigns around vaccination, COVID testing, and prevention of infectious disease. If confirmed by the Senate, she would be the first full-time agency director since Susan Monarez, MD, was fired by Secretary Kennedy last August in a clash over vaccines policy and the role of science. According to news reports, Schwartz would lead a team of senior executives carefully selected to restore order and rebuild both staffing and public trust in the agency.

**Reforms in store:** In contrast to that signal of stability, Kennedy's testimony this week before two House committees showed that his efforts to stir the pot on public health are far from over. Calling the [U.S. Preventive Services Task Force](#) (USPSTF) “lackadaisical and negligent for 20 years,” Kennedy told House lawmakers that he would shift the task force's work and bring on new members with a “clear mission,” albeit an unspecified one. [News reports](#) suggest that a focus will be on such Kennedy-favored issues as autism screening in young children and counseling on early allergen introduction to prevent food allergies in children.

The widely expected move to overhaul the task force followed a full year in which Kennedy had canceled all its meetings ([Washington Update](#), March 27, 2026), raising concerns that he sought a reprise of his efforts to reshape the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP). Those efforts appear to be ongoing despite a federal court's recent freeze on the earlier ACIP overhaul. APG joined other organizations this week in [warning](#) that Kennedy's recently proposed

new [charter](#) for ACIP could further undermine vaccine confidence and jeopardize vaccine coverage and access.



## **More Reconciliation Bills Pushed By Congressional Republicans May Or May Not Target Health Care**

As previously reported in [Washington Update](#) (April 3, 2026), Republican leaders in the House and Senate continue to shape new [reconciliation legislation](#) that could pass later this spring or summer on simple majority, party-line votes. Likely to be narrowly tailored to advance spending on immigration enforcement measures, the package is not expected to contain health care cuts as spending “offsets.” But some Republican lawmakers are also eyeing yet another reconciliation bill – which would be the third during this congressional session -- that would follow the one currently under development and that may target savings from health care fraud, waste, and abuse.

Under consideration are various “program integrity” measures targeting durable medical equipment, skin substitutes, and laboratory testing, along with mechanisms to recoup federal funds steered to states and tied to improper payments ([Washington Update](#), March 13, 2026). But prospects for another such legislative push appear highly uncertain, given the short timeline in an election year among other factors. APG will continue to monitor developments and keep members apprised about looming actions.



## **In Case You Missed It**

- **Amy Gleason, Acting Administrator of the U.S. Digital Service and Strategic Advisor to CMS, described this week on APG’s [Emerging Trends webinar](#) how her then-young daughter’s [rare autoimmune condition](#) and need to carry “the Mom binder around” to share information among 12 different doctors motivated Gleason’s long quest to improve information flow across health care. Gleason discussed the importance of physicians and hospitals participating in CMS’s [Health Tech Ecosystem Initiative](#), which she leads, with Valinda Rutledge, APG’s executive vice president of advocacy and policy.**
- Pressed on HHS budget issues during a [hearing](#) before the House Appropriations committee this week, **Secretary**

**Kennedy said that the department plans to reverse last year's DOGE-led firings** by hiring an additional 12,000 employees, raising total departmental employment to 84,000. The fired employees “presided over the biggest decline in health in the history of the world” and “failed at their job,” but will be replaced “with a better group of people who are actually going to address chronic health.”

- University of Chicago economist **Casey Mulligan will assume a new position as chief economist and chief regulatory officer at HHS, focusing on health care affordability**, according to [Axios](#).
- **CMS acknowledged a major data error in the agency's review of alleged Medicaid fraud in New York state**, revising the number of beneficiaries receiving personal care services from about five million to about 450,000 and acknowledging that the agency misidentified the state's billing codes.
- In the wake of expiration of enhanced premium tax credits, **average 2026 enrollment in the Affordable Care Act's individual health insurance market appears to have declined by 17 percent to 26 percent**, leading to sicker risk pools and more challenges for health plans, a new Wakely [analysis](#) suggests.
- A [Politico poll](#) of 3,851 U.S. adults shows that **vaccine skepticism is widespread, with nearly half saying vaccine science remains up for debate, about half supporting fewer vaccinations, and approximately 40 percent viewing mandates as harmful**. Nearly twice as many Republicans as Democrats favor fewer vaccines even as majorities still support certain childhood vaccination requirements.



## **APG Announcements And Offerings**

- Registration is open for the **APG Spring Conference 2026: Delivery, Dollars, And Determination: Challenges and Opportunities In Accountable Care** to be held May 27-29 at the Marriott Marquis Marina in San Diego. Please [register now](#).
- **Sponsorship is also now open for the Spring Conference**. Please visit our [Spring Conference 2026 sponsor website](#) and reserve your space today.
- APG will host the following webinars and other sessions in the coming weeks:

- A members-only sponsored webinar presented by Merck: "**Help Prevent RSV Lower Respiratory Tract Disease in Infants in their First RSV Season**" on Tuesday, April 28, 3:00 p.m. ET. APG Members may contact Lura Hawkins at [lhawkins@apg.org](mailto:lhawkins@apg.org) to register.
- An **APG Learning Session re: 2027 Medicare Advantage (MA) Final Rate Notice and Technical Rule** on Wednesday, May 6, 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. ET.  
Please register [here](#).
- A members-only sponsored webinar presented by Genetech, Inc: "**Highlights from the 2026 Trends in Specialty Drug Benefit Report**" on Tuesday, May 12, 4:00 p.m. ET. Members may contact Lura Hawkins at [lhawkins@apg.org](mailto:lhawkins@apg.org) to register.
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).

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