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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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## **More Vaccine Uncertainties Ahead Amid Administration's Legal Appeal And New Surgeon General Nominee**

Notwithstanding its recent efforts to shift public attention away from its disruptive vaccines policies, the Trump administration signaled this week that the core focus of those controversial policies remains intact.

After weeks of silence, the administration [moved to appeal](#) the March federal district court decision that blocked the administration's remake of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), along with the changes in various vaccines recommendations that followed ([Washington Update](#), March 20, 2026). Next, President

Trump withdrew the nomination of Casey Means to be surgeon general amid questions over her vaccine views ([Washington Update](#), Feb. 27, 2026) - but quickly nominated another candidate whose perspectives on vaccines appeared to be almost as confusing.

**Hoping for a reprieve?** In its one-sentence notice of appeal, the U.S. Justice Department did not spell out any legal arguments against the March court decision, which will be heard by the Boston-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. Legal experts say Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. may be hoping that the appeals court will stay the district court's decision and allow the next regularly scheduled ACIP meeting to take place in late June. Kennedy last month filed an [updated charter](#) for ACIP that dramatically shifted the committee's focus, emphasizing that it should include individuals with knowledge of "recovery from serious vaccine injuries," "adverse effects following vaccination," and "decreas[ing] symptomology" of vaccine-preventable diseases rather than controlling them.

The withdrawal of the Means nomination for surgeon general came after Alaska Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski said she would vote no on the nomination, dooming approval of Means' nomination by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) committee, the newsletter *Politico Pro* reported. President Trump's new nominee for the slot is [Nicole Saphier](#), MD, a radiologist and director of breast imaging at a Memorial Sloan Kettering facility in Monmouth, New Jersey, as well as a podcaster and medical contributor to Fox News. Saphier has made conflicting comments on vaccines, saying on her [podcast](#) that "When vaccination rates drop, preventable diseases come back," but also expressing opposition to vaccine mandates, advocating parental rights to space out childhood vaccines and questioning current recommendations for administration of the HPV vaccine to adolescents.



## **Hospitals' Contribution To Cost Issues, Potential Solutions Focus of House Panel Hearing**

Hospital pricing, consolidation, and the straitened circumstances of many rural hospitals dominated a House Ways and Means committee [hearing](#) this week, at which several large health system CEOs emphasized policy proposals that could help versus those that could hurt them further. The hearing was the latest of a series this year in which House lawmakers have homed in on different sectors, including insurance, to probe root causes of access and affordability

issues within the health care system ([Washington Update](#), Jan. 23, 2026).

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith (R-MO) [pointed](#) to hospitals as a major driver of health care price and spending increases, calling them “borderline extortion” and highlighting price hikes of 300 percent over the past two decades. He and other lawmakers partly blamed hospital mergers and consolidation, noting that research has “found that hospital mergers are not generally associated with better health.” Spending at hospital-owned outpatient departments (HOPDs) and the [facility fees](#) built into HOPD claims was a specific target of Republican lawmakers’ attacks, with several urging legislation to enact more [site-neutral payment reforms](#) in Medicare to equalize payment for care provided in HOPDs and those in other outpatient settings, including physician-owned facilities.

**Health system perspectives:** Hospital and health system executives who testified cited numerous pressures on their costs and revenues and pointed to several steps that could help. Wright Lassiter III, President and CEO of CommonSpirit Health, whose affiliated medical group is an APG member, urged lawmakers to consider a list of practical suggestions, including simplifying the “quality and efficiency measures required in various hospital quality programs.” He also recommended creating a single common claims system for Medicaid and requiring prompt payment from health plans, noting that CommonSpirit is carrying \$4.3 billion “on our balance sheet from unpaid claims from Medicare Advantage.” With nearly 70 percent of CommonSpirit’s patient volumes coming from Medicare and Medicaid, he also said that the system stands to lose \$1 billion in revenue per year once all Medicaid cuts enacted in last year’s reconciliation law are fully in place.



## **As Midterm Elections Near, Senate Democrats Outline Health Care Messaging, Draw Contrast With GOP**

Seeking to gain an electoral edge over Republicans in forthcoming elections, Senate Democrats this week released a health care messaging [framework](#) and pointed to their recently released [report](#) drawing a contrast with recent GOP policies and actions. But by design, both documents are heavy on the critique aimed at Republicans, and lighter on specific new policies that the Democrats endorse.

**Voters' key concern:** The messaging and report come as a new KFF [poll](#) shows that about nine in ten likely voters say health care costs will influence their votes in 2026. The Senate Democrats' materials focus generally on reducing costs across Medicare, Medicaid, ACA Marketplace plans, and commercial coverage by lowering premiums, deductibles, and prescription drug spending. They point to higher ACA Marketplace premiums following last year's expiration of enhanced premium tax credits (EPTCs), the rising medical debt affecting tens of millions of Americans, and estimates of large potential coverage losses linked to the 2025 reconciliation law, noting that large majorities of Americans have told pollsters that they oppose Medicaid cuts.

The framework does not specify any new legislative proposals but builds on the doomed Democratic [plan](#) of last year to extend the EPTCs. The messaging aims to draw a contrast with President Trump's "[Great Healthcare Plan](#)," which emphasizes lowering prices through drug pricing policies and shifting tax subsidies directly to consumers' health savings accounts and flexible spending accounts, rather than using them to defray ACA plan premiums ([Washington Update](#), January 16, 2026).



## In Case You Missed It

- **Medicare physician payment changes and future Part B drug price negotiations could increase financial pressure on independent physician practices**—particularly in specialties reliant on facility-based services and drug add-on payments for administering Part B drugs—according to new [analysis from Avalere Health](#).
- Bipartisan [legislation](#) newly introduced by House lawmakers adds to a growing list of **measures requiring Medicare Advantage plans to issue timely responses to prior authorization requests**. The measure comes as more than 50 major health insurers said that they would [implement](#) a standardized prior authorization submission process beginning January 1, 2027, following through on a prior [pledge](#) to HHS.
- **CMS will ramp up its investigation into a surge of new hospice providers in Texas** as part of expanded anti-fraud efforts, Administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, MBA, told a Paragon Health Institute forum this week. He also told a Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center symposium that “A lot of people from other countries are making a lot of money in America,” citing apparent health care fraud schemes

conducted by Russian groups in California and Chinese groups in New York, among others.

- The **17 state-based ACA health insurance exchanges recorded 900,000 disenrollments from ACA plans** from January to March 1, a number that was 24 percent higher than in the same period last year, according to a [report](#) from the State Marketplace Network. Separately, **Cigna announced that it would exit the ACA individual market at year's end**, a move that will force nearly 370,000 people to find new coverage.
- **Racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care persist across states**, with Hispanic adults most likely to report that financial barriers caused them to miss care, according to the Commonwealth Fund's [2026 State Health Disparities Report](#). The report anticipates that disparities will worsen as federal policy changes, including Medicaid cuts and ACA coverage shifts, take effect.
- A new **economic analysis published in JAMA Pediatrics shows that not routinely administering the first hepatitis B vaccine at birth**, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices as of last year, will lead to more preventable childhood infections, cases of liver cancer, deaths, and higher health care costs.



## 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:
  - 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.

- A **sponsored webinar about the "APG Group Purchasing Program (GPO)"** on Wednesday, June 17, at 2:00 pm ET. Four companies participating in APG's GPO — Altura, COPE Health Solutions, Una, and Ventegra — will present on their offerings and special pricing for APG members. **Please register [here](#).**
- Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts? [Join APG Advocates today](#).

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