



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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Fate Of FDA Commissioner Nominee May Ride On Politics And Policies On Vaccines And Abortion

More than three months after former Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner Martin Makary, MD, was forced out of the agency after months of turmoil President Trump this week named his chosen replacement in the role: [Heidi Overton, MD, PhD](#), currently deputy director of the White House Domestic Policy Council and a former top official with the conservative think tank, the [America First Policy Institute](#). If Overton's candidacy advances to a Senate vote to confirm her, the outcome seems likely to hinge on whether she can garner enough Republican senators' support despite unease among some over her prominent role in the Trump administration's anti-vaccine campaign.

Outgoing Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) — who voted last year to confirm Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., only to go on to denounce Kennedy’s anti-vaccine actions later — [criticized](#) Overton this week for her role in what he described as the “nonsensical” White House executive order released last week that called once more for overhauling the federally recommended childhood vaccine schedule ([Washington Update](#), Aug.14, 2026). But Cassidy, who termed Overton’s role “almost disqualifying” and who also questioned her lack of managerial expertise, stopped short of saying he would oppose the nomination. Along with Cassidy, other Republican senators have raised questions about various nominees’ vaccine views in the past, with most of them only to close ranks and later vote to confirm the nominees.

Medication abortion dispute: By contrast, Overton seems likely to face a wall of Democratic resistance over her longstanding [opposition](#) to FDA’s regulatory actions involving the abortion medication mifepristone. Overton has said that the drug poses “serious risks” to women, despite the fact that it was approved by the FDA more than a quarter-century ago – and she has also opposed the FDA’s 2023 decision to permanently authorize telehealth prescribing and mail delivery of the drug. Republican attorneys general in six states, most with strict abortion bans, have sued the agency in federal court to overturn the telehealth and mail delivery policy, leading the Supreme Court recently to [keep that policy in place](#) while the litigation proceeds. By contrast, a recent Virginia federal court [ruling](#) would actually force the agency to loosen some of its remaining restrictions on prescribing mifepristone even further.

Meanwhile, FDA is currently conducting yet another safety review of the drug ahead of an October court deadline, which Overton could arguably influence if she is confirmed by then to lead the agency. And Attorney General Todd Blanche has [vowed](#) to use his department’s auspices to help restrict or halt mail-order and telehealth delivery of mifepristone to make a sweeping abortion ban “permanent in every single state.”



Record Federal Debt Growth Raises Specter Of More Bitter Debates Over Health Care Spending

As the gross federal debt this week [surpassed](#) \$40 trillion – and grows by nearly \$7 billion daily, the fastest rate ever – renewed scrutiny over the nation’s fiscal plight is under way. As Congress is forced to [reckon ahead of schedule](#) sometime next year with

another increase in the federal debt ceiling, that scrutiny is likely to extend once more to Medicare and other federal health care spending, and how the nation can support optimal spending levels in this area while righting its fiscal ship.

The backdrop: Of the \$40 trillion in gross debt, [20 percent](#) is actually debt that one branch of the federal government owes another – for example, in the trust funds held by Social Security and Medicare, among others. The remainder – the federal debt in the hands of the public – is the more worrisome portion at present, given the pressure on interest rates that financing that growing stock of debt produces. The U.S. Treasury [announced](#) this week that it would shift course and double the amount of long-term Treasury bonds that it would buy back in an attempt to nudge those interest rates lower, presumably to help prevent the economy from sliding into recession, as some economists now believe it might.

The tie-back of these dynamics to health spending is as follows: As Congress reengages next year over raising the debt ceiling yet again, the nation is likely to be one year closer to the looming insolvency of both the Medicare and Social Security trust funds, now projected for 2033-2034 – as well as facing growing gaps in what these programs will take in revenues over the coming years versus what will be spent. Meanwhile, Congress and the Trump administration have chosen to fund the large tax cuts enacted last year partly by attempting to slow the growth of federal Medicaid spending, through programmatic changes likely to harm state and hospital finances and spur growth of the uninsured.

Bad choices ahead: Whichever party holds preeminent power in Congress next year will thus face excruciating choices among attempting to rein growth of the federal debt, preserve public programs and citizens' wellbeing, and fund a health care system that is in many respects closer to the edge than is commonly understood. Congress watchers should expect more bitter fights among those who want to further slash health spending versus those who want to restore it.

APG will closely follow the debate, and stand up for its members' interests in continuing to preserve and advance high quality, cost effective, and accountable care.



In Case You Missed It

- Details of [new risk-adjustment models](#) that will be used for the new Long-Term Enhanced ACO Design (LEAD) model have been released by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which says that the new models

will “place increased weight on demographic factors, reducing the need for ACOs to invest in risk coding activities.”

- A **“Qual-Tech” event** scheduled for November will afford eight finalists the chance to pitch AI and other tech solutions to CMS to augment its efforts to improve quality and safety. [Submissions](#) from entrants are due September 4.
- **Senate-confirmed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Erica Schwartz, MD, told CDC staff** this week that a new vaccine task force to be established under the most recent White House vaccine executive order will not replace the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, but will rather examine “all of the possibilities regarding immunizations and patient-parent choice,” according to news reports.
- **The Department of Health and Human Services’ efforts to remake federally-funded teen pregnancy prevention programs to promote abstinence and discourage contraception, and by terminating existing grants to longtime pregnancy prevention program providers, was blocked this week** by a federal District Court judge in Washington, DC, who ruled in favor of four plaintiffs — two counties in Minnesota and Washington state, a Midwest branch of Planned Parenthood, and a [nonprofit sex education](#) organization.
- **The American Medical Association (AMA) should make its proprietary Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes publicly available at no costs, argues a lawsuit from a transparency-focused nonprofit group,** as [another urges](#) Congress to direct CMS to “build the road map for replacing” this arrangement with a single, CMS-maintained public code set.
- **Mergers and acquisitions among physician practices and ambulatory care accounted for one-third of all M&A activity in the health care providers and services sector in the first half of 2026,** according to a [report](#) by Baker Tilly Capital.
- **HHS Secretary Kennedy’s commitment to “end the chronic disease epidemic in this country” has devolved into an “incoherent strategy” that has largely ignored “sodium, tobacco, added sugars, alcohol, adverse childhood experiences, and other established chronic disease risk factors,”** writes Anand Parekh, MD, MPH, chief health policy officer at University of Michigan’s School of Public Health in [Health Affairs Forefront](#).



APG Announcements And Offerings

- [Registration is now open](#) for the **APG Fall Conference 2026 - From Policy To Practice: *What's Next For Accountable Care?*** to be held November 18-20 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland near Washington, DC. Please register now for Super Early Bird savings.
- [Sponsorship registration](#) is also now open for the Fall Conference. Please visit our Fall Conference 2026 sponsor website for more information about sponsorships and exhibitor opportunities.
- APG will host an **Informational Session on the 2027 Proposed Rule on the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule and MSSP** on **Tuesday, August 25, 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm ET**. Please register for the webinar [here](#).
- Join the APG hosted webinar titled **"Intercepting Chronic Disease: Utilizing Preventive Diagnostics to Improve Patient Population Health,"** on **Tuesday, September 22, 3:00pm ET** presented by Quest Diagnostics. The webinar is open to the public. Register [here](#).
- Learn more about **APG's Group Purchasing Program**, where a variety of companies are offering special pricing to APG members during a webinar on **Thursday, September 24, 2:00 pm ET**. Register [here](#).
- The APG hosted webinar titled **"Implementing evidence-based guidelines for Cardio-Renal-Metabolic patient populations,"** presented by Boehringer Ingelheim, will take place **Tuesday, November 10, 2:00 pm ET**. The webinar is open to the public. Register [here](#).
- **Want to get more involved in APG's Federal advocacy efforts?** [Join APG Advocates today](#).