

Wynne Health Group Weekly



FRAMING THE WEEK

Congressional Democrats are pressing ahead to pass **President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion [American Rescue Plan](#)** through budget reconciliation. The individual bills approved by various House committees last week will be combined into a single package and marked up by the House Budget Committee this week. The House is expected to vote on, and pass, the reconciliation package next week. Marked up reconciliation language in the House is unlikely to change prior to the House vote.

The \$1.9 trillion package provides funding for various **public health activities** and programs (e.g., COVID-19 vaccines, testing, contact tracing, surveillance); bolsters the public health and health care **workforce** (e.g., community health centers); supports new and existing initiatives to address **mental and behavioral health** issues as well as **food insecurity** exacerbated by the pandemic; and replenishes the **Coronavirus Relief Fund** to support states and localities. The reconciliation package also contains several measures intended to increase access to health insurance coverage, including expanded eligibility for premium tax credits (e.g., income above 400 percent of federal poverty level, unemployed individuals regardless of income), COBRA subsidies, and a temporary FMAP increase to incentivize states to expand Medicaid.

Considering the looming expiration of temporary federal unemployment benefits on March 14, 2021 and a general sense of urgency, the Senate may bypass the committee markup process and move the anticipated House-approved reconciliation package directly to the floor. Any changes to the package will likely occur there, which may include revisions to comply with the **Byrd Rule** that prohibits the inclusion of "extraneous matters" in a budget reconciliation, such as those that do not have a substantial impact on federal spending. The Senate is in [recess](#) this week.

Looking ahead, the new COVID-19 relief package proposes extending the temporary federal unemployment benefits through August 29, 2021. In addition, other relief measures, such as the COBRA subsidies and increased SNAP and WIC benefits, would expire at the end of FY 2021 on September 30, 2021. Based on these new expiration dates, we may see Congress take action on another COVID-19 relief package in the summer. Negotiations on this package may coincide with discussions on funding for FY 2022, which begin October 1, 2021, and are likely to be complicated by the **anticipated return of earmarks**. House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro is expected to make an announcement about earmarks as soon as this week.

On Friday (Feb. 19), the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis is slated to convene a hearing to discuss **equity issues concerning access to the COVID-19 vaccine**. Mitigating health inequities amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic is a top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration. The newly announced [COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force](#), chaired by Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith and tasked with providing recommendations on how to allocate COVID-19 resources and disburse COVID-19 relief funding, will [meet](#) next week.

THIS WEEK IN HEALTH POLICY

Wed. (2/17)

- **11:00am – Hearing: Broadband** – The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology convenes a hearing titled, “Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems.” [Details](#).

FEATURED WHG ANALYSIS

- ***NEW* WHG Issue Brief: No Surprises Act Implementation** – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).
- **WHG: Implementation Timeline of the Omnibus Package** – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).
- **WHG Legislative and Regulatory Outlook for 2021** – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).
- **WHG: Regulatory Freeze: Key Policies and Dates** – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).
- **WHG: Materials Related to COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence** – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).
- **WHG Catalogue of COVID-19 Government Response** – December-January Edition – In the Policy Hub Insight Bank [here](#).

CONGRESSIONAL LOOKBACK

Fri. (2/12)

- **House committees** marked up legislation under the reconciliation instructions adopted in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Joint Budget Resolution (S.Con.Res.5) – a key step to pass President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan through budget reconciliation. [Details](#).
- **CBO** released the budget and economic outlook for 2021 to 2031 – a regularly updated report that presents projections of federal deficit, debt, revenues, and spending over the next 10 years. [Details](#).

Mon. (2/8)

- **The Black Maternal Health Caucus** introduced the Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021. The legislation – comprised of 12 individual bills – aims to build on existing legislation to address the maternal health crisis in America – a crisis disproportionately impacting expectant Black mothers and other women of color. [Details](#).

REGULATORY LOOKBACK

Thurs. (2/11)

- **HHS** announced a [sixth amendment](#) to its declaration under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act for medical countermeasures against COVID-19. Specifically, the amendment adds a new category of qualified persons covered under the PREP Act. [Details](#).

Wed. (2/10)

- **The Biden-Harris Administration** announced a set of new steps it is taking to expand vaccine distribution and supply in the U.S. [Details](#).
- **FDA** [issued](#) emergency use authorization (EUA) for the combination of bamlanivimab and etesevimab (monoclonal antibodies) for the treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19 in adults and pediatric patients at least 12 years old who are high risk for progressing to severe COVID-19. [Details](#).

Tue. (2/9)

- **CMS** further extended the deadline for Q3 2020 submission of Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) data and electronic clinical quality measures (eCQM). [Details](#).
- **CMS** requests comment on proposed changes to the Quality Rating System (QRS) and Qualified Health Plan (QHP) Enrollee survey program. Comments are due by March 10, 2021. [Details](#).

COMMENT & APPLICATION DEADLINES

- **Feb. 19:** FDA [announced](#) a request for nominations for members to serve on the National Mammography Quality Assurance Advisory Committee in the Center for Devices and Radiological Health. [Details](#).
- **Feb. 22:** HRSA announced a maternal health-focused Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – Primary Care Training and Enhancement-Community Prevention and Maternal Health. [Details](#).
- **Feb. 27:** The FDA issued a [request for nominations](#) for voting members to serve on the Technical Electronic Product Radiation Safety Standards Committee.
- **March 4:** The HHS Office of Minority Health is seeking nominations of qualified candidates for appointment to the Advisory Committee on Minority Health. [Details](#).
- **March 10:** CMS requests comment on proposed changes to the Quality Rating System (QRS) and Qualified Health Plan (QHP) Enrollee survey program. [Details](#).
- **March 12:** CDC released a [request for nominations](#) for membership to the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women.
- **March 15:** HRSA announced a maternal and child health-focused Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems: Health Integration Prenatal-to-Three Program. [Details](#).
- **March 15:** USPSTF [announced](#) a request for nominations to serve on the task force. Selected members will serve a four-year term. [Details](#).

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