

COVID-19 Weekly Public Policy Recap

April 10, 2020

Congressional Updates

Two weeks after the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and a week after the enactment of significant portions of that law, Congress is in a stand-off concerning additional aid and potential for a fourth COVID-19 legislative package.

After a bumpy rollout of the Paycheck Protection Program, a CARES Act program that provides government-backed loans to small businesses, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin requested on Tuesday an additional \$250 billion to keep the program going. Many nonprofits have reported difficulties in securing loans as financial institutions have prioritize issuing loans to for-profit companies.

The Senate bill to provide additional funds in the interim was met with resistance from House leadership and as a result, Senate democrats the bill and instead offered an “interim” package that was double the size. The “interim” package added to the White House requested another \$100 billion for hospitals, doubled the money for states, bolstered the maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefit by 15 percent, ensured more small-business funds are allocated to firms that have trouble accessing the new loans because they don't have established relationships with traditional lenders and allocation of dollars specifically loaned to women- and minority-owned businesses. The interim package was also unable to secure the votes needed for passage out of the Senate.

Senate Democrats are expected to be in meetings with Treasury Secretary Mnuchin throughout the weekend to hash out the needs for an interim package. After a call with Secretary Mnuchin this morning, Senator Schumer [told](#) reporters there's no reason not to expect bill passage early next week.

Speculation remains for when a full blown fourth package will be introduced in the House.

Administration Updates

The Trump Administration stirred more controversy this week as President Trump has recently taken up the charge of more aggressively challenging the authority and independence of agency watchdogs overseeing the \$2.2 trillion COVID package passed by Congress. He recently fired one inspector general tied to his impeachment in late January, reprimanded another who was critical of the coronavirus response, and sidelined a third meant to prevent wasteful coronavirus fund spending. These actions have come with heavy criticisms from democratic members of Congress who want guaranteed oversight of the trillions being pumped into the economy as a result of large stimulus packages. Inspector Generals are installed by Congress within agencies as an “inside man” for Congressional constitutional oversight. This could [affect](#) how Congress appropriates funds in the expected fourth COVID package.

Coverage Issues During COVID-19 Era

This week a KFF analysis estimated that between 670,000 and 2 million uninsured people around the country eventually could be hospitalized with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Reimbursing hospitals for those treatments could cost between \$13.9 billion and \$41.8 billion. The Trump administration has indicated that it plans to reimburse hospitals for the care of uninsured COVID-19 patients through the \$100 billion fund authorized by Congress however, the

Administration has continued to indicate it will **not** allow for a special enrollment period for Affordable Care Act plans despite pressure from legislators and patient advocacy groups alike.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused delays in a federal probe into Medicare Advantage health plans. CMS officials, citing a need to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, have temporarily halted some efforts to recover hundreds of millions of dollars in overpayments made to Medicare Advantage health plans. These plans treat more than 24 million Americans, mostly seniors, who are at high risk for health complications from coronavirus. In July 2019, Kaiser Health News reported that the government had overpaid Medicare Advantage plans by nearly \$30 billion in the past three years alone. The CMS audits are designed to curb overcharging by Medicare Advantage plans, to which the government pays more than \$200 billion a year. The audits are years behind schedule, largely because of industry opposition.

Healthcare Supplies and Shortages

Across the country hospitals are facing increasing shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, respirators, and more as the National Strategic Stockpile became depleted this week. This comes after the Federal government distributed 10,000 ventilators to those areas hit hardest by the pandemic.

Governors have expressed frustration that without more equipment from the stockpile they are left bidding against each other — and the federal government — for supplies as private sector manufacturers produce them. Currently, there is no single authority overseeing all federal purchases of PPE. Help is coming soon though as HHS is now under contract with Philips in addition to General Motors under the Defense Production Act to replenish supplies.

Recent Komen Engagement

This week, Komen joined several patient advocacy organizations in calling on Congress to include provisions protecting patients from surprise medical bills in the fourth COVID package. We also joined a letter calling for the expansion of the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act and a letter by an ad hoc group of nonprofits on improvements which can be made to the non-profit provisions in the CARES Act. These letters can be found on [myKomen](#).

As legislators deliberate on the timing of the fourth COVID-19 related legislative package we are drafting a letter to lawmakers about the pressing needs of breast cancer patients during this crisis. This letter will then be used to develop an action alert, allowing our grassroots to stay engaged in the conversation.

In Other News

[Black, Latino communities suffering disproportionately from coronavirus, statistics show](#)
[These States May Be Hit Hardest Financially by The Coronavirus, According To Moody's](#)
[Cancer Surgeries and Organ Transplants Are Being Put Off for Coronavirus. Can They Wait?](#)
[‘It’s Like Walking Into Chernobyl,’ One Doctor Says Of Her Emergency Room](#)
[U.S. coronavirus deaths top 16,000: Reuters tally](#)
[States across country see rise in coronavirus cases](#)
[Surgeon General: Most of US won't be ready to open by May 1](#)