

Special Needs Alliance:

Public Policy News You Can Use



December 1, 2025

Celebrating 50 Years of Special Education in Public Schools

Saturday November 29th marked the 50th anniversary of the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) and was [celebrated](#) by the over 8 million children and their loved ones who received free, appropriate public education. Before the IDEA was signed into law, many students with disabilities were institutionalized, isolated, and denied access to public education. In 1975, Congress required public schools to provide equal access to education for all students with disabilities and provided financial assistance to support necessary accommodations. In the 2022–2023 school year, 95% of students with disabilities [attended](#) public schools, representing 7.6 million students.

Although the program has been highly successful, advocates including [the National Education Organization](#), [Coalition on Human Needs](#), and [Center for American Progress](#) have shared their worries with the Trump administration's actions. From 2024 to 2025, the federal government spent 28% (38.66 billion dollars) less than what was originally committed in 1975. In response to federal underfunding of IDEA services, many schools rely on Medicaid to cover the costs of student support services including nursing, mental, and behavioral health services. Annually, Medicaid spends about 7.5 billion dollars on services for kindergarten through twelfth grade eligible students. As private school vouchers gain popularity, it is important to note that private schools are not required to follow IDEA, meaning students with disabilities could be at risk if private schools overtake public schools.

HHS Adds Leaders to Make America Healthy Again Initiative

On Monday, November 24, [five senior leaders](#) were sworn in at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), marking an advancement to Trump Administration's Make America Health Again (MAHA) initiative. HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. stated that the appointments reflect his commitment to delivering meaningful reforms and improving the health and well-being of Americans.

- Brian Christine, MD, was appointed as Assistant Secretary for Health and is tasked with restoring the nation's trust in public health along with Title X family planning and other broad public health initiatives.
- Alex Adams, PharmD, was appointed Assistant Secretary for Family Support and will oversee the Administration for Children and Families.
- Gustav Chiarello was appointed as Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources and previously served as a lawyer for the House Judiciary Committee, specializing in Federal Trade Commission issues.
- Michael Stuart was appointed as HHS General Counsel following his service as United States Attorney in West Virginia.
- Alicia Jackson was appointed as Director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) following her tenure in the private sector and as deputy director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's (DARPA) biological technologies office.

Dr. Christine's confirmation drew scrutiny over past comments expressing skepticism about vaccines, including his assertion that vaccination is "an individual decision." Mr. Stuart faced similar criticism regarding his views on vaccines as well as for his strong opposition to abortion.

What's on Tap

Congress returns to session this week in the final legislative sprint of the calendar year. Lawmakers have only three work weeks to decide how to address the Affordable Care Act (ACA) enhanced tax subsidies that are due to expire at the end of this year. The deadline is poised to be a [serious challenge](#) for Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), who will have to navigate a variety of tensions within the Republican party surrounding the tax subsidies and the ACA itself. Just last week, the Trump Administration had to roll back its proposal to extend the subsidies for two years with new eligibility limits after facing substantial pushback from more conservative lawmakers [including](#) Speaker Johnson himself. The White House also showed interest last week in a plan to give money directly to consumers to purchase coverage through the Marketplace, which has garnered support amongst some GOP lawmakers. Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Rick Scott (R-FL) have both supported the idea of directing ACA subsidies funds to fund individuals Health Savings Accounts (HSA).

Despite the lack of support from the Speaker, some centrist GOP lawmakers have already begun reaching across the aisle to work with Democrats to extend the subsidies beyond 2025. Representative Jen Kiggans (R-VA-02) previously [introduced a bill](#) that would extend the subsidies for one year, which has also been endorsed by 14 other Republicans and 14 Democrats. Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-01) and a group of GOP lawmakers also reportedly convened to discuss extending the subsidies ahead of the Thanksgiving recess,

signaling serious interest from House GOP lawmakers for an extension of ACA subsidies. Republicans on Capitol Hill are also weighing the potential impact of the expired subsidies in the upcoming 2026 midterm elections. Recent Democrat electoral victories in special elections throughout this year and [low poll numbers](#) have led to concern among some House Republicans up for re-election next November – particularly those in competitive districts. Coupled with some 20 million Americans seeing a rise in their healthcare costs if the ACA subsidies expire, there is ample pressure on lawmakers to achieve some consensus before the end of the year.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have resumed the regular Medicare rulemaking process following the end of the historic government shutdown. With CMS back at full staff capacity, it released the [Contract Year \(CY\) 2027 Medicare Advantage and Part D Proposed Rule](#) early last week and the [CY 2026 Home Health Prospective Payment System Final Rule](#) on November 28th. Both rules mark the first regulatory cycle for the Trump Administration on these programs since taking office early this year and are potentially indicative of this administration's priorities for Medicare Advantage and Home Health for the rest of this Presidential term.

Upcoming Events

Senate

- In Session: December 1-5
- Wednesday, December 3rd, 10:00am | Senate HELP Committee holds a hearing on [Making Health Care Affordable Again: Healing a Broken System](#) | 430 Dirksen Senate Office Building

House

- In Session: December 1-4