

Special Needs Alliance:

Public Policy News You Can Use



January 27, 2026

Medical Organizations Seek to Reverse HHS Childhood Vaccine Schedule Changes

A coalition of medical organizations have [expanded](#) their lawsuit against Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., seeking to reverse recent changes to the childhood vaccine schedule. The organizations, including the American Academy for Pediatrics (AAP), American College of Physicians (ACP), and others, initially sued Secretary Kennedy and other federal health leaders in July 2025 after HHS removed pregnant women and healthy children from the list of populations recommended to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

In the fourth amendment to the complaint, the coalition's lawsuit now seeks to reverse the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) decision to [reduce](#) the number of vaccines included in the recommended childhood immunization schedule from 17 to 11 and block an upcoming convening of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Last year, Secretary Kennedy dismissed the entire ACIP panel and reconstituted the committee with new members more closely aligned with the Administration's more skeptical approach to vaccination policies. In their lawsuit, the plaintiffs allege that if ACIP is allowed to continue meeting, the advisory body will continue to negatively impact vaccine utilization throughout the nation. In contrast, an HHS spokesperson argued that the administration was only removing corporate interests from the vaccine scheduling process while still incorporating expert opinion.

House Approved Appropriations Packages Faces Challenges in the Senate

On Thursday January 22nd, the House of Representatives [passed](#) the final appropriations bills of the fiscal year: one funding the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS) and Labor (HHS), Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Education, and Homeland Security (DHS). Although the [President's Budget](#) proposed significant reductions, the appropriations package generally maintained the agencies' funding at current levels. Among other notable provisions, the health care components of the package increase funding for

the National Institutes of Health, reform pharmaceutical benefits managers' business practices, and extend the Medicare telehealth flexibilities and Acute Hospital Care at Home program.

Over the weekend, Senate Democrats indicated they [would not support](#) the six-department government funding package in its current form. Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) stated that Democrats would not provide the votes necessary to advance [the DHS appropriations bill](#) - which includes funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This decision comes in the wake of the [fatal shooting](#) of intensive care unit (ICU) nurse Alex Pretti by a federal agent in Minneapolis on Saturday, January 24th. Senate Democrats, with support from some House and Senate Republicans, [called for an investigation](#) into ICE's tactics in Minneapolis. Consequently, the Senate is unlikely to garner the 60-vote filibuster-proof supermajority needed to pass the DHS legislation which is expected to cause a partial government shutdown.

On the other hand, Senate Democrats remain poised to work with Senate Republicans to advance the combined appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education; Defense; and Housing and Urban Development and Transportation; (collectively referred to as LHHS+). Minority Leader Schumer [urged](#) Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) to avert a large-scale shutdown by bringing the LHHS+ package to the floor for a vote while they negotiate changes to the DHS bill. If Congress passes and the president signs the LHHS+ package, 11 of 12 appropriations bills will be passed ahead of the funding deadline, ensuring most of the government is funded for the rest of the fiscal year.

CMS Data Show U.S. Health Spending Jumped 7.2% in 2024 as Utilization Surged

U.S. health care spending totaled \$5.3 trillion in 2024, rising 7.2% from the prior year, according to new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) national health expenditure data published in [Health Affairs](#). The increase follows a 7.4% growth in 2023, marking the strongest two-year surge in decades as utilization rebounded after deferred care from the COVID-19 pandemic. CMS attributed the growth to higher-than-anticipated care intensity and increased use of hospital services, physician care, and prescription drugs.

The spending growth occurred alongside historically high insurance coverage rates. The insurance rate in 2024 (91.8%) is slightly below the peak in 2023, likely reflecting Medicaid unwinding. In 2024, Medicaid enrollment declined by 7.9 million individuals from the previous year, down to 84.3 million individuals. On the other hand, health care spending continued to outpace economic growth (5.3%), rising to 18% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP).

A separate Health Affairs Forefront analysis, "[Growth in National Health Expenditures: It's Not the Prices, Stupid](#)," argues the current pace of health care spending growth is unsustainable and by greater volume and intensity of care, not rising prices. The authors note there was little excess medical inflation, retail drug prices grew below inflation, and insurer non-medical spending increased more slowly than overall health expenditures. Instead, increased

utilization, higher-acuity coding, shifts toward higher-cost settings, and growing use of expensive products are the primary inflationary contributors. The authors emphasize that long-term fiscal stability requires addressing care delivery and payment systems, not shifting costs.

What's on Tap

Late last week, the House advanced the final six-bill appropriations bill, sending the package to the Senate before the House adjourned for recess. Democratic Senators are [poised to block](#) at least a portion of the package in response to the second widely-publicized shooting of Alex Pretti by federal officers. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) announced over the weekend that Democrats would block the Department of Homeland Security portion of the package to provide stricter oversight of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. Minority Leader Schumer called on Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) to separate the DHS funding bill from the package to allow the Senate to vote on the remaining five bills that would ensure over 90 percent of the federal government is funded through the end of the fiscal year.

With Senate Democrats vowing to oppose any DHS funding, Majority Leader Thune is effectively left with two options: attempt to pull the DHS appropriations bill out and vote on the remainder of the House package or pass the other five appropriations bills individually. To remove the DHS appropriations bill from the 6-bill package, Majority Leader Thune would need the full consent of the Senate. On the other hand, voting on each appropriations bill individually presents Senate leadership with a logistical nightmare. Last Friday, the Senate cancelled voting on Monday in response to inclement weather predictions, leaving the chamber only four days to pass the package before a partial government shutdown. Meanwhile, the House is scheduled to be out of session until February, meaning any revised bills would need to be revoted on by the House.

Fissures within each party's response to Mr. Pretti's death further complicate a path to fund the government ahead of the January 30th deadline. Although Senate Republican leadership maintains their stance to vote on the DHS funding bill with the rest of the package, some rank-and-file Republicans oppose a package that does not include DHS funding while several GOP Senators publicly questioned ICE's conduct. The pending funding package, which includes appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and a variety of vital healthcare extenders, accounts for nearly 75 percent of federal discretionary spending. Should the Senate be unable to reach an agreement on a path forward and fail to pass any appropriations bills, a substantial portion of the federal government would [shut down](#) beginning Saturday the 31st.

Upcoming Events

Senate

- In Session: January 27-30

- Thursday, January 29th, 9:30am | Senate Special Committee on Aging holds a hearing titled [“Americans Deserve to Know Where Their Drugs Come From”](#) | SD-608

House

- Out of Session