

# Special Needs Alliance:

## Public Policy News You Can Use



**November 18, 2025**

### Disability Rights Activist Alice Wong Passes Away

On Friday, Alice Wong, an activist and author for disability rights and justice [died](#) at age 51. Alice was awarded as a [MacArthur "Genius" Fellow](#) last year in recognition of her powerful storytelling and commitment to disability justice. She served on the National Council on Disability from 2013 to 2015. Wong founded the [Disability Visibility Project](#), an online community that amplifies disability media and culture. In 2016, she co-founded #CripTheVote, a nonpartisan online movement that engaged voters and politicians in conversations about disability issues. Further, she published op-eds highlighting ableist policies including one on her [opposition to drinking straw bans](#) and another on the [importance of mask mandates](#). Wong's family [shared](#) that she will be remembered as "a fierce luminary in disability justice, a brilliant writer, editor and community organizer" and invited her friends, community, and fans to contribute to her [GoFundMe](#) to continue the legacy of her work.

### Republicans Divided on Future of ACA APTCs

Last week, Congress passed and President Trump signed into law a continuing resolution that ended the longest government shutdown in history, lasting 54 days. The [legislation](#) funds all government agencies through the end of January while reviving multiple expired health care measures. The compromise legislation did not include any language regarding the expiring Affordable Care Act (ACA) advance premium tax credits (APTCs). House Republican leaders plan to begin [listening sessions](#) next week to gather input from members on health care policy ideas and the fate of the expiring subsidies. The discussions will be modeled on earlier GOP policy meetings aimed at building consensus around a broader health care package.

Republicans remain divided on the path forward. Moderates are pushing a bipartisan compromise to temporarily extend the subsidies for the ACA APTCs, while conservatives favor replacing them with expanded health savings accounts. Meanwhile, Democrats are circulating a discharge petition to force a vote on a three-year extension. With only weeks before the subsidies expire, the outcome of these discussions will determine whether Congress can unite behind a short-term fix or risk leaving millions of Americans facing higher health insurance costs in the new year.

## States Face Tight Medicaid Budgets Amid Rising Costs and Federal Cuts

As states complete the “unwinding” of pandemic-era continuous coverage, Medicaid enrollment fell by 7.6% in FY 2025 and is expected to remain flat in FY 2026, according to [KFF's 25th annual Medicaid Budget Survey](#). Despite fewer enrollees, total Medicaid spending grew by 8.6% in FY 2025 and is projected to increase another 7.9% in FY 2026, driven by provider rate increases, higher enrollee health spending, and rising costs for long-term care, pharmacy benefits, and behavioral health services.

States also face mounting fiscal pressure from slower revenue growth and \$911 billion in federal Medicaid spending cuts enacted in this year's budget reconciliation law. These cuts, which include new financing restrictions and work requirements, are expected to exacerbate already tight state budgets. Nearly two-thirds of states say there's at least a “50-50” chance of a Medicaid budget shortfall in FY 2026.

While many of the federal cuts won't take effect until FY 2027 or later, states are already bracing for the impact. Fewer states plan to increase provider reimbursement rates, and more are imposing rate restrictions to contain costs. Most states are also advancing new initiatives to curb prescription drug spending. Interest in covering GLP-1 drugs for obesity treatment is declining, with some states planning to restrict coverage, although coverage remains mandatory for diabetes and cardiovascular conditions.

The KFF survey, conducted with Health Management Associates and the National Association of Medicaid Directors, reflects states' FY 2025 budget assumptions and projections, though some uncertainty remains.

## CMS Announces Increases to 2026 Traditional Medicare Premiums

Late last week, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [announced](#) upcoming changes to traditional Medicare premiums, deductibles, and copayments. Medicare Part B covers physicians' services, outpatient hospital services, durable medical equipment, and some home health services. From 2025 to 2026, CMS increased Part B premiums by 10 percent (\$18). Next year, Part B premiums will cost \$203 per month, marking 2026 as the first year Part B premiums cost more than \$200 per month. Although premiums are rising, CMS noted that a recently finalized policy on skin substitute products prevented an additional \$11 per month increase in Part B premiums. Deductibles and copayments for Medicare Part A, which covers inpatient hospital, skilled nursing facility, inpatient rehabilitation, hospice, and some home health care services, will also increase. Most traditional Medicare beneficiaries rely on supplemental plans (also referred to as Medigap plans) to cover out-of-pocket costs. Nonetheless, more beneficiaries may opt to move into Medicare Advantage plans, which are typically more affordable and provide additional benefits beyond those offered in traditional Medicare, in an effort to reduce their share of rising health care costs.

## What's on Tap

Congress returns to Washington this week following the end of the longest government shutdown in history. President Trump signed a [continuing resolution](#) (CR) on November 12

that ended the 54-day shutdown after narrow House passage (222–209). The package funds federal agencies through January, revives several expired health programs, and includes full-year appropriations for a handful of federal agencies. It reimburses states for shutdown-related costs, reverses federal worker layoffs, and delays further workforce reductions until February 2026. The bill also wipes out the statutory [PAYGO scorecard](#), eliminating 3.4 trillion dollars in accumulated deficit impacts. Notably, the compromise excludes an extension of the expiring Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium subsidies. This week, Congress will consider measures to address the looming ACA premium subsidies

Health policy will dominate Capitol Hill this week as both [House Ways and Means](#) and [Senate Finance](#) hold high-profile hearings. Ways and Means will examine strategies to protect vulnerable patients and prevent chronic disease by improving care coordination. Senate Finance will focus on solutions to rising health care costs. The witness list signals that Senate Republicans are publicly testing alternatives to the Affordable Care Act subsidy structure, since two Republican experts with conflicting views are expected to highlight internal party tensions ahead of a December vote.

At the same time, the Trump Administration is [advancing its own overhaul](#) of the Affordable Care Act subsidy framework. CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz said Sunday that the president is willing to look at all options ahead of the looming lapse, citing fundamental flaws in the current structure, including waste, fraud, and abuse tied to brokers and third-party enrollment entities. President Trump has floated redirecting subsidies from insurers to consumers through direct payments, even as House Democrats push a three-year extension and Senate leadership prepares floor action. CMS projects benchmark premiums will continue rising regardless and estimates that average 2026 premiums for the lowest cost plans will reach 50 dollars, which is 13 dollars higher than this year. The approaching deadline has increased pressure on lawmakers to reach agreement before the enhanced credits expire.

## Upcoming Events

### Senate

- In session: November 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>
- Wednesday, November 19, 10:00 am | Senate Finance Committee holds a hearing to [Examine the Rising Cost of Health Care, Focusing on Considering Meaningful Solutions for All Americans](#) | 215 Dirksen Senate Office Building
- Wednesday, November 19, 3:45 pm | Senate Special Committee on Aging hold a hearing to [Examine Made in America, Focusing on Restoring Trust in Our Medicine](#) | 216 Hart Senate Office Building

### House

- In session: November 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>

- Wednesday, November 19, 2:00 pm | House Ways and Means Committee Subcommittee on Health holds a hearing on [Modernizing Care Coordination to Prevent and Treat Chronic Disease](#) | 1100 Longworth House Office Building