



Health Policy Briefing

September 8, 2020

Senate Hopes to Consider Slimmed-Down COVID Relief Bill

Senate Republicans are planning to consider a targeted, \$500 billion Coronavirus relief bill this week if they can garner enough support. However, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) acknowledges that it has been difficult to reach agreement, especially in an election year. The skinny stimulus package is significantly smaller than the \$1 trillion proposal put forth by Senate Republicans last month. The Senate Republican conference has scheduled a call for this morning with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows to discuss the timing of a vote. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has expressed opposition to the use of interim legislation in the absence of a broader deal. Meadows stated last week that progress has been made in negotiations with congressional Democrats, but that an agreement has yet to be reached on funding for state and local governments. The Senate returns from August recess today, while the House is not scheduled to be back in session until next week. It is possible that the slimmed-down proposal could ultimately be attached to a continuing resolution (CR) to fund the government past the end of the fiscal year on September 30.

White House, Democrats Reach Agreement on Stopgap Spending Bill

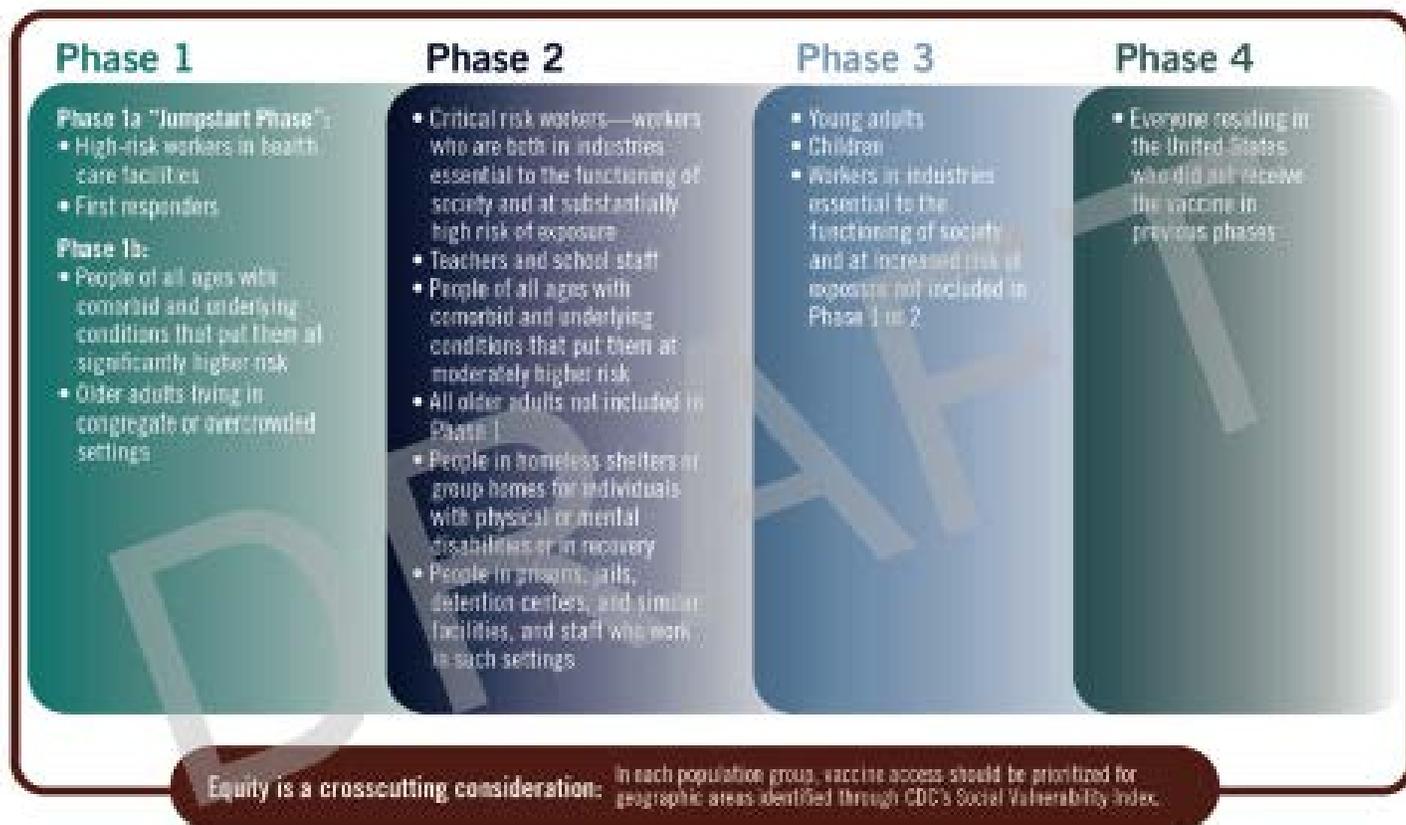
Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) have reached an informal deal to fund the federal government and avoid a shutdown at the end of the fiscal year on September 30. The two sides have agreed on a clean, short-term continuing resolution (CR), the duration of which is still unclear. The stopgap spending measure is expected to extend government funding through December, requiring lawmakers to pass another CR during a lame-duck session to fund the government into 2021.

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Advisory Panel Releases Draft Vaccine Distribution Recommendations

An advisory group at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has released its proposed recommendations for how to prioritize distribution of an eventual COVID-19 vaccine. Their [draft report](#), which was released last Tuesday, would prioritize based on who is at risk for contracting coronavirus.



A virtual public meeting on the recommendations was held on Wednesday, and comments were accepted until Friday, September 4. The committee's final report will be completed later this month and is intended to be used as a guide for more detailed prioritization plans, which are already being considered by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and state, local, and tribal health authorities.

House to Consider MORE Act this Month

Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) announced that the House will vote on the **Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment, and Expungement (MORE) Act** (H.R. 3884) the week of September 21. The bill would decriminalize marijuana at the federal level. It was introduced by Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) and advanced by his panel last November. It remains unclear whether the proposal could receive consideration in the GOP-controlled Senate. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is a strong supporter of access to hemp but is opposed to broader marijuana reform. Democratic vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) introduced the Senate companion legislation to the **MORE Act**, though presidential candidate Joe Biden has also expressed opposition to broad marijuana reform.

House Oversight to Subpoena AbbVie

House Oversight Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) issued a memo to panel members last week stating her intent to subpoena AbbVie related to an investigation of the company's drug pricing practices. Maloney cited the company's refusal to provide requested information on its anti-inflammatory Humira and cancer drug Imbruvica. A spokesperson for AbbVie stated that the company has cooperated with the Committee since first receiving the request for documents in January 2019. The subpoena is a part of the panel's investigation into the drug pricing practices of 12 companies that sell high-cost medications.

Oversight Democrats Probe Ventilator Contracts

The House Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy is opening a investigation into federal contracts negotiated by White House trade adviser Peter Navarro. According to Chairman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.), the investigation is a part of his panel's effort to gather more information about pandemic-related agreements for ventilators made by the Trump administration with Philips Respironics. The White House abruptly canceled much of the \$646 million ventilator contract last week and will instead require the company to supply only 12,300 ventilators. An earlier report by the committee found that the agreement with Philips Respironics provided a much higher payment than other contracts.

CDC Tells States to Prepare for Vaccine This Fall

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Robert Redfield sent a letter to governors telling states to prepare for coronavirus vaccine distribution as early as November 1. The letter, dated August 27, states that the CDC and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is "rapidly making preparations to implement large-scale distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines in the fall of 2020." McKesson Corp. has been contracted to support vaccine distribution to state and local health departments. While three vaccine candidates have recently entered the last stage of clinical trials, definitive results on the vaccines are not expected until the end of the year.

FDA Personnel Update

John Wagner, Associate Commissioner for External Affairs at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), will assume a new role in the office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR). Emily Miller, the FDA's top spokesperson, was removed from the agency's communication office several days prior Wagner's announcement. Miller will remain at the FDA in an advisory role. The FDA's communication efforts have been in the spotlight since the issuance of an emergency use authorization (EUA) for convalescent plasma to treat COVID-19 and Commissioner Stephen Hahn's public citation of misleading data in support of the treatment.

Hart Health Strategies COVID-19 Resources

Hart Health Strategies Inc. continues to update the following resources related to the coronavirus pandemic. Please remember to clear your cache to ensure you download the most recent documents.

- [COVID-19 Testing](#)
- [Disaster Primer](#)
- [Federal Relief Overview](#)
- [Health Care Workers on the Front Lines](#)
- [Hospice and Palliative Care](#)
- [Nursing Resources](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [Physician Provisions](#)
- [Re-Opening America](#)
- [Small Business Resources](#)
- [Small Business - Paycheck Protection Program](#)
- [Small Business – PPP FAQ](#)
- [State Resources](#)
- [Tax Provisions](#)
- [Telehealth Overview](#)

Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Markups

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee hearing “Vaccines: Saving Lives, Ensuring Confidence, and Protecting Public Health;” 9:30 a.m., 430 Dirksen Bldg.; September 9

House Energy and Commerce Committee markup of 38 bills; 11:00 a.m., Cisco Webex; September 9

House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Research and Technology hearing “The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on University Research;” 11:30 a.m., Videoconference; September 9

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing to examine S. 785, to improve mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs; 3:30 p.m., 106 Dirksen Bldg.; September 9

House Veterans Affairs Committee legislative hearing; 10:05 a.m., 210 House Visitors Center; September 10

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee hearing “COVID-19: An Update on the Federal Response;” 10:00 a.m., G50 Dirksen Bldg.; September 23

Senate Judiciary Committee hearing “Examining Threats to American Intellectual Property: Cyber-attacks and Counterfeits During the COVID-19 Pandemic;” 2:30 p.m., 226 Dirksen Bldg.; September 23

Senate Armed Services Readiness and Management Support Subcommittee hearing “Supply Chain Integrity;” 9:15 a.m., G50 Dirksen Bldg.; October 1

Recently Introduced Health Legislation

H.R.8098 — To address hospital consolidation and promote hospital price transparency, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rep. Banks, Jim [R-IN-3]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Judiciary; Energy and Commerce

H.R.8105 — To improve the ability of veterans with medical training to assist the United States in response to national emergencies, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rep. Lamb, Conor [D-PA-17]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.8107 — To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on efforts by Department of Veterans Affairs to implement safety planning in emergency departments, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rep. Levin, Andy [D-MI-9]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs

H.R.8108 — To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of serious mental illnesses; Sponsor: Rep. Malinowski, Tom [D-NJ-7]; Committees: House - Veterans' Affairs; Energy and Commerce; Armed Services

H.R.8114 — To provide nursing homes with resources for responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency to protect the health and safety of residents and workers, to reauthorize funding for programs under the Elder Justice Act of 2009, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Rep. Wagner, Ann [R-MO-2]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Judiciary; Energy and Commerce; Education and Labor