

PROTECT OUR CARE

**** Weekly Wrap Up ****

[October 30 - November 5, 2021]



Protect Our Care Arizona sponsored a mobile billboard outside U.S. Representative Scott Peters' (D-CA-52) office, urging him to support Medicare negotiations for lower drug prices for all Americans.

Democrats Reach Deal to Give Medicare the Power to Negotiate Prescription Drug Prices in Build Back Better Act

Democrats in Congress reached a historic agreement to lower prescription drug prices for all Americans. This agreement gives Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices, caps seniors' out-of-pocket drug costs, and stops excessive price increases for existing medications. In response, Protect Our Care Chair Leslie Dach issued the following statement:

“President Biden and Democratic leaders fought tirelessly to include prescription drug reform in the Build Back Better Act, and now they have a plan to make it happen. For far too long, drug companies have dictated prices. Americans pay three times more than people in other countries, but that all stops with this plan.

“Now, Medicare will have the power to negotiate lower drug prices, no senior will pay more than \$2,000 a year for their prescriptions, no diabetic Medicare patient will pay more than \$35 per month for their insulin, and every American will be protected from egregious price increases for the drugs they need. Combined with the other health measures in the Build Back Better Act, Democrats will lower insurance premiums, expand coverage and lower the cost of drugs for millions. This is the most significant expansion of affordable health care since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. That’s a big deal.

“The only loser today is Big Pharma. Instead of wasting millions of dollars on failed lobbying efforts and scare tactics, drug companies can now put more money towards innovation and research. Reducing the cost of prescription drugs will save lives, and we have President Biden and Democrats to thank for bringing real relief to millions of people.”

MEMORANDUM: The Build Back Better Act Will Transform Health Care for Millions of Americans

TO: Interested Partners

FROM: Protect Our Care

DATE: November 5, 2021

RE: The Build Back Better Act Will Transform Health Care for Millions of Americans

The Build Back Better Act will be the most significant expansion of U.S. health care since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. The legislation includes historic measures to lower the cost of prescription drugs and insurance premiums, extend affordable coverage to millions, expand Medicare benefits to cover hearing, and invest \$150 billion in home care for seniors and people with disabilities. By passing Build Back Better, Democrats are proving their commitment to building a future where health care is a right, not a privilege.

Polling shows the health care measures in Build Back Better have nearly universal support, and voters of all parties want bold action on health care.

Under The Build Back Better Act:

- **48 million** Medicare Part D enrollees will have out of pocket costs for prescription drugs capped at \$2,000 per year.
- **9 million** Americans will save on their monthly health insurance premiums
- **2.2 million** Americans currently in the Medicaid “coverage gap” will gain health coverage

- **62 million** Americans on Medicare will gain coverage for hearing
- **Medicare will have the power to negotiate for lower drug prices.** By 2030, more than 100 drugs will be eligible for Medicare price negotiation, in addition to insulin products.
- **ALL Americans** will be protected from Big Pharma's arbitrary price hikes that rise faster than inflation

Build Back Better Lowers Prescription Drug Prices

Giving Medicare The Power To Negotiate Lower Drug Prices. For nearly 20 years, Medicare has been banned from negotiating the price of prescription drugs, and Big Pharma has been able to dictate prices while Americans pay three times more for their medications than people in other countries. Under Build Back Better, Medicare will be empowered to negotiate prices for select drugs purchased at the pharmacy counter and administered at a doctor's office. Beginning in 2025, 10 drugs, in addition to insulin, will be negotiated with that number increasing to 15 drugs in 2026, and 20 drugs in 2028 and into the future. By 2030, more than 100 drugs will be eligible for Medicare price negotiation, in addition to insulin products. Drug companies who refuse to come to the negotiating table will be subject to an excise tax.

Capping Out-Of-Pocket Spending For Seniors. Seniors with serious conditions like cancer, multiple sclerosis, and rheumatoid arthritis could save thousands of dollars on prescriptions under the Build Back Better Act. Medicare Part D out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs will be capped at \$2,000 per year beginning in 2024. The redesign of Medicare Part D will also allow out-of-pocket spending to be smoothed over the course of the year, so patients are not forced to pay the entirety of their out-of-pocket cost all at one time.

Making Insulin Accessible And Affordable. Insulin co-pays for all Americans with insurance will also be capped at \$35 each month.

Putting An End To Outrageous Price Increases. Build Back Better stops Big Pharma from raising price increases faster than the rate of inflation. For example, Humira, a medication commonly used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, is one of the nation's highest revenue generating drugs, raking in \$21 billion in sales in 2019. AbbVie, Humira's manufacturer, has hiked the price of Humira 27 times, including in January 2021 when it raised its cost by 7.4 percent. This cap would apply to all Americans, no matter whether you are insured or not, and no matter what kind of insurance you have, and is essential to stop arbitrary price increases on essential medications. Over the past 20 years, price increases for brand-name drugs in Medicare Part D have risen at more than twice the rate of inflation.

Build Back Better Lowers Health Insurance Premiums

Nine Million Americans Will Save On Monthly Premiums. Nine million Americans will save an average of \$600 annually on their premiums when they buy insurance on their own through the ACA Marketplaces. For a family of four making \$80,000 a year, premiums will drop nearly \$250 a month, or nearly \$3,000 a year.

Expanding Health Coverage For Millions Of Americans. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that ACA enrollment would increase by 3.6 million people including 1.4 million who would otherwise be uninsured and 600,000 would have received unsubsidized coverage.

Reducing Income Coverage Disparities. Build Better Better ensures families above the 150 percent threshold pay no more than 8.5 percent of their income towards coverage. This will help middle-income families facing excessive premiums or living in high-premium areas.

Expanding Coverage for Communities of Color. The Center on Budget Policy and Priorities estimates the increased savings continued under Build Back Better will cause a sharp decline in the uninsured rate across every racial group, with one in three uninsured Black adults gaining coverage. Prior to the American Rescue Plan, more than 11 million uninsured adults were eligible for premium tax credits, with people of color making up roughly half of the group.

Build Back Better Expands Medicaid

2.2 Million Americans Currently Denied Medicaid Will Gain Health Coverage. The Build Back Better Act will allow more than two million Americans currently trapped in the Medicaid coverage gap to access zero dollar premium health coverage. Of those currently in the coverage gap, 62 percent are in the labor force, 30 percent are parents with children at home, more than 25 percent are essential workers, and 15 percent of adults have a disability.

Zero Dollar Premiums for Millions. In addition to covering the 2.2 million Americans in the Medicaid coverage gap, Build Back Better delivers zero dollar premium coverage to the 1.8 million uninsured individuals with incomes between \$12,880 and \$17,774 each year (100-138 percent of the federal poverty level). These plans

Drastically Reducing Racial Health Disparities. Closing the Medicaid coverage gap is the single most important policy to expand coverage and reduce racial inequities in the American health care system. People of color are more likely to have a lower median income and live in a state

without Medicaid expansion, compared with their white counterparts. In 2019, 60 percent of individuals in the coverage gap were people of color.

Improving Coverage For Millions of Working Americans Whose Employer Coverage is Too Expensive Or Of Poor Quality. Millions of low-wage workers are offered employer health coverage that is cost prohibitive and not comprehensive. Over the past decade, premiums for low-wage workers have increased at nearly double the rate of wages. Build Back Better ensures that individuals who would be eligible if their state expanded Medicaid, can enroll in an ACA marketplace plan even if their employer offers coverage. This will allow low-wage workers to access comprehensive health coverage at little or no cost.

Build Back Better Expands Medicare Benefits

Millions Will Gain Access To Hearing Care. Build Back Better would add hearing coverage to Medicare Part B starting in 2024. Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that a Medicare hearing benefit could aid all 62 million Medicare beneficiaries, particularly the 36 million purchasing coverage on their own or simply going without. Hearing coverage under Build Back Better would include hearing rehabilitation and treatment services, as well as hearing aids. Build Back Better would also allow audiologists and hearing aid specialists to qualify for Medicare reimbursement.

Addressing High Out-Of-Pocket Costs. In 2018, Medicare beneficiaries paid an average out-of-pocket cost of more than \$900 for hearing care. Only 30 percent of seniors over 70 who need hearing aids are able to use them, with Kaiser Family Foundation citing affordability as the likely culprit millions do not seek hearing care or hearing devices. Build Back Better expand Medicare to include hearing coverage by providing \$35 billion in funding for hearing care.

Build Back Better Will Dramatically Improve Maternal & Infant Health

Providing 12 Months Of Continuous Coverage To Postpartum Women. In 2018, 45 percent of births were paid for by Medicaid, with 50 percent or more births covered by the program in 22 states. Medicaid covers 65 percent of all births to Black mothers. With Black maternal mortality rates 3.2 times higher than for white women, Build Back Better recognizes the expansion of Medicaid coverage to post-partum individuals is a pressing racial justice issue by providing 12 months of continuous coverage to postpartum women.

Millions Invested To Address Social Determinants Of Health. The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act provisions included in the Build Back Better Act contain \$100 million to address

social determinants of maternal health at the local level. This would include once-in-a-generation investments in housing, nutrition, and environmental conditions with the explicit focus of improving maternal health.

Funding Health Equity Measures. The Build Back Better Act includes \$170 million to bolster and diversify the perinatal health workforce, including funding for midwives whose involvement is essential to reducing maternal deaths, as well as \$50 million to enhance doula services. An additional \$100 million has been included for maternal mental health equity and \$50 million for maternal health research at Minority-Serving Institutions.

Directly Confronting Systemic Racism in Maternal Care. \$50 million for training to address racism, discrimination, and bias — originally part of the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act — is included in the Build Back Better Act. This training for health care professionals is just one of the many necessary steps required to begin addressing racism in the American health care system and improve maternal health equity.

How Build Back Better Ensures Continuous CHIP Coverage

Keeping Children on Medicaid For A Full Year Who Abruptly Lose Coverage. The Build Back Better Act would require states to provide 12-month continuous coverage for children on Medicaid and CHIP. As of January 2020, 31 states provided continuous coverage. States that don't provide continuous coverage experience increased churn, or children who dis-enrolled and re-enrolled in coverage within the same year. Continuous coverage would help reduce racial disparities as nearly 14 percent of Hispanic, 12 percent of Black, and 13 percent of children in low or moderate income households faced uninsurance for all or part of the year.

Build Back Better Expands Home And Community-Based Services

Build Back Better Will Allow Millions of Americans To Grow Old At Home. Medicaid is currently the largest provider of home and community-based care, providing essential services to seniors and people with disabilities. Build Back Better will provide an additional \$150 billion for home and community-based services, that would provide care to the 2.5 million Americans already participating in the program, and help alleviate the current waitlist of more than 800,000 individuals. Federally provided home and community-based services funds helped more than 100,000 individuals return to their homes and communities from nursing facilities between 2008 and 2019, highlighting the enormous need for Build Back Better to strengthen this essential program.

Nearly 820,000 People On HCBS Waiting Lists Gain Assistance. In 2018, Medicaid waivers provided care for 2.5 million HCBS enrollees. As the aging population continues to grow, over three-quarters of states have HCBS waiver waiting lists. Individuals spend an average of 39 months on waiting lists prior to eligibility screening. The Build Back Better Act will provide HCBS funding to help the nearly 820,000 Americans on waiting lists.

HCBS Expansion Strengthens Direct Care Workforce. The direct care workforce is disproportionately composed of black, female, and lower-wage workers. In 2018, 58 percent of direct care workers earned less than \$30,000 a year. Additionally, nearly one-third of workers live in a low-income family that makes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line. 82 percent of the direct care workforce are women and one in four workers are Black. The Build Back Better Act will combat the HCBS workforce shortage that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and historically low wages.

Families Will Save An Estimated \$5,800 In Home Care Costs. Older Americans and people with disabilities are often forced to liquidate their assets to afford as little as two years of in-home care. The HCBS provisions included in the Build Back Better Act will save families paying out-of-pocket an estimated \$5,800 a year for four hours of care per week.

“I Am Not Giving Up”: Senator Klobuchar and Patient Advocates Demand Medicare Negotiation Now



[Watch the Event Here.](#)

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) joined health care advocates and Protect Our Care for a virtual roundtable on lowering drug costs and keeping meaningful Medicare negotiation in the final Build Back Better Act. Congress has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring relief to patients struggling to afford their medications. During today's event, storytellers from across the country shared what's at stake for them if lawmakers fail to act.

The roundtable comes after Democrats announced a framework for the Build Back Better Act that fails to include any measures to lower prescription drug prices. While Big Pharma continues to lobby against action to lower drug prices for patients, Democratic leadership have pledged to include Medicare negotiation in the final bill.

"We're in this fight because too many Americans are struggling to access their medications," **said U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)**. "It is more expensive to get prescription drugs in our country than in other countries, even though it's our taxpayers that have funded so much of the research in the past five years. That's why I have been spearheading these efforts to let Medicare negotiate since I've been in the Senate. It's common sense policy."

"The fight is not over to stand up to Big Pharma and put patients over profits," **said Protect Our Care Chair Leslie Dach**. "It is unconscionable that millions of families are forced to choose between the medications they need to survive and paying for other necessities like food or rent. We must meet this moment and deliver on the needs of families nationwide by giving Medicare the power to negotiate for lower drug prices."

"Legislation like Medicare negotiation is going to save lives," **said Mindy Salango, Type 1 Diabetic and patient storyteller from West Virginia**. "That is what is at stake not only in West Virginia, but across the country. We need our leaders to step up and speak for us and help us because that's what we voted for. That's what we put them in office for. And this bill is completely across party lines. Diabetes didn't ask me if I was a liberal or conservative when it decided to enter my life. People want it, we need it."

"I suffer from systemic lupus. In order to keep it under control, you need medications. There was one medication that was \$3,000 a month, I cannot afford it. And when you're on a fixed income, it blows your budget," **said Beatriz Morrison, a patient storyteller from Arizona**. "There's a lot of people out there in my neighborhood, in our country, that have to forego medications -- it just isn't right. I have a senator that doesn't want to help us. [Senator Sinema] said she was going to help us, and she doesn't seem to want to. A lot of people are out there dying."

“I've been a nurse for 37 years, 12 of those years I've worked with the high-risk epilepsy population, who often need three to four medications to remain with controlled seizures. I had the heartwrenching experience of losing a patient who was 26 years old. Like many patients, Jay was unable to afford medication to treat his seizures, and it left him with nowhere to turn.” **said Rachelle Compton, a nurse from California.** “It just doesn't make any sense to me that this is allowed in America. People's lives are actually lost due to the pharmaceutical situation that we have here. It's maddening and it's really sad.”

“I'm a community pharmacist in Teaneck, New Jersey, and every single day in my practice, customers come to me complaining about the cost of prescription drug prices,” **said Michael Fedida, community pharmacist and pharmacy owner of J&J Pharmacy in New Jersey.** “The 1500 lobbyists that are in Washington seem to have much more power than the entire Senate and Congress. It's just so frustrating that it's become a game of just money. People don't seem to care about people's lives and the quality of life that people are entitled to in this country.”

“Pre-COVID, I didn't have to think about my medical bills. I didn't have to think about how I was going to pay for prescriptions. Through COVID, we ended up closing most of our businesses. I suffer from multiple autoimmune disorders and have several other illnesses, and now I have to think about ‘Oh, am I going to be able to pay for this \$2,000 medication this week? Am I going to be able to pay for this \$300 item,’” **said Himali Patel, small business owner and patient storyteller from Georgia.** “It's up to the powers that be to go ahead and fight for our people to do better and do right by us.”

STATEMENT: Jobless Claims Plunge Even Lower to 269,000 As President Biden Continues Fight to Get the Country Back on Track

The latest weekly first-time jobless claims plunged to another pandemic low of 269,000. The news comes as the Biden administration unveiled the details of two rules mandating vaccinations for 100 million workers nationwide. Protect Our Care Executive Director Brad Woodhouse issued the following statement:

“Another week of declining jobless claims means President Biden’s policies to boost the economy are working. Democrats delivered direct stimulus checks, housing assistance and monthly child tax credit payments to families, billions in state and local aid to keep essential workers on the job, and robust funding for vaccine distribution.

“Now, cases are on the decline as the administration continues its work to promote vaccine mandates, deliver booster shots, and roll out children’s vaccinations. With more shots in arms and more Americans back to work every day, we have President Biden to thank for nearing the light at the end of this long, dark tunnel. With the Build Back Better Act on the way, Americans can expect the robust job growth seen under President Biden to continue.”

New Vaccine Rules Show President Biden’s Leadership on COVID-19

The Biden administration unveiled the details of two rules mandating vaccinations for 100 million workers nationwide. Under the first rule, companies with 100 employees or more must ensure that their workers are fully vaccinated by January 4 or submit them to rigorous testing regimes. The second rule requires employees at health care facilities receiving federal funding to be vaccinated by January 4 -- with no exceptions. **In response, Protect Our Care Chair Leslie Dach issued the following statement:**

“These rules are another critical step in the country’s fight against COVID-19 and a testament to President Biden’s unwavering commitment to keeping families safe. Vaccine mandates are not only overwhelmingly popular with voters, they’re extremely effective. While Republican leaders have done just about everything in their power to undermine vaccinations and prolong this pandemic, President Biden has taken bold action to get more shots in arms and deliver relief to the American people. There is no doubt vaccine mandates will save lives and boost the economy, and the new rules are another welcome step to get the pandemic behind us.”

“We Cannot Turn Back Now:” Frontline Democrats Call for Passing Medicare Negotiation in Build Back Better Act

U.S. Representative Angie Craig (D-MN-02) and 14 swing-district Democratic members of the House released a letter calling for the final Build Back Better Act to give Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. Members recognize that delivering lower drug prices means keeping their promises to voters.

They wrote, "With the Build Back Better agenda, we have a perhaps once in a generation opportunity to change the status quo and make good on our promise that no one should have

to choose between affording their prescription drugs or food or housing. The public is on our side. Big Pharma is not." [Click here to read the full letter.](#)

From Washington Post's Health 202: "House Democrats from some of the most vulnerable seats are urging leadership to include drug pricing measures in the bill. 'Soon, we must go back to our districts and explain what we've done in Washington to make our constituents' lives better,' the 15 frontline Democrats wrote in a letter Sunday. 'We ran on upsetting the status quo and lowering out-of-pocket costs for healthcare and prescription drugs.'" [Washington Post, [11/1/21](#)]

From Politico Huddle: "Fifteen frontline Democrats sent a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) Sunday night urging the inclusion of prescription drug pricing provisions in the final social spending package, reminding their leadership of the promises they made to voters. 'As majority-makers in competitive districts, we promised our constituents that we would come to Washington to fight on their behalf for lower drug prices. We cannot turn back now on our promise to the American people,' the lawmakers wrote." [Politico, [11/1/21](#)]

SHOT/CHASER: Biden's Vaccination Campaign Hits Major Milestone As Labor Market Picks Up

SHOT: [80% Of Adults Now Have at Least Their First Shot and 70% Of Adults Are Now Fully Vaccinated.](#)

CHASER: [Labor Market Shows Signs of Hiring Uptick as Coronavirus Surge Fades](#)

In The States

FLORIDA

November 4 — Virtual Event on Medicaid Expansion and Prescription Drug BBB Provisions with Rep. Charlie Crist and Florida Health Care Advocates: Advocates along with Congressman Charlie Crist (D-FL-13th) joined Protect Our Care Florida and Florida Alliance for Retired Americans to discuss the inclusion of Medicaid expansion in the Build Back Better Act, which will expand health care coverage for over four million people in the 12 states—including Floridians—where Republicans previously rejected Medicaid expansion. This transformative

act by President Biden and Democrats in Congress will reduce racial disparities in health care, create healthier communities, and strengthen the economy. “For too long, Americans have been squeezed by high drug prices while drug companies make record profits,” **said Congressman Charlie Crist (D-FL-13th)**. “For too long, too many Americans have had to ration their medication, risking illness, injury and death, because their lifesaving drugs cost too much. By allowing Medicare to negotiate the cost of drug prices through the Build Back Better plan, we can level the playing field and create a playing field where people have the power, not pharmaceutical companies.” **You can watch the event here.**



CLIPS

- Florida Politics: ‘Authoritarian regime’: Charlie Crist slams Ron DeSantis over Special Session, Medicaid expansion

Local Headlines

Alabama

- AP: Alabama Lawmakers Approve Job Protections For Unvaccinated

Alaska

- Anchorage Daily News: Alaska Gov. Dunleavy Forbids State Agencies From Following Federal Vaccination Mandates

Arizona

- AP: Arizona High Court Upholds Ruling Blocking School Mask Bans

California

- KHN: California Law Aims To Strengthen Access To Mental Health Services
- San Francisco Chronicle: San Francisco Will Soon Require Everyone 5 And Older To Show Vaccination Proof For Restaurants, Theaters, Warriors Games

Colorado

- Bloomberg: Colorado Lets Hospitals Turn Away Patients As Covid Surges Anew

Connecticut

- AP: [Connecticut Changes Covid Policy On Quarantining Students](#)

Florida

- AP: [2 Of Florida's Largest School Districts Ease Up On Masks](#)
- Politico: [DeSantis To Sue Over Vax Requirements](#)

Idaho

- AP: [Idaho's Covid Numbers Drop Slightly, Crisis Standards Remain](#)

Kentucky

- AP: [States Sue To Block Vaccine Mandate For Federal Contractors](#)

New York

- Washington Post: [New York City Cuts Vaccine Mandate Deal With Unions](#)

Maine

- Bangor Daily News: [Waiting To Vaccinate Kids Is Risky, Maine's Public Health Chief Warns](#)
- Politico: [SCOTUS Allows Maine Vaccine Mandate To Remain In Effect](#)

Montana

- KHN: [Montana's Governor Nixed A Kids' Vaccine Campaign, So Health Officials Plan Their Own](#)

Oklahoma

- The Oklahomian: [Kevin Stitt Seeks Covid-19 Vaccine Exemption For Oklahoma National Guard](#)

Vermont

- Boston Globe: [Vermont, The Most Vaccinated State In The Nation, Has Been Weathering A Spike In Covid Cases. But Why?](#)

West Virginia

- AP: [Paid Leave's Demise Tough On Backers In Manchin's Home State](#)