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National Advocacy

Congress Continues to Work on Major Legislative Packages

The debt limit issue and completing the 2022 federal budget have been delayed until early December, when both the continuing resolution (CR) to provide temporary funding for federal agencies and the temporary debt ceiling increase expire. In the meantime, Congress continues to push forward and will try to reach consensus on a path for both the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the Democratic reconciliation package, also known as the Build Back Better Act or the social infrastructure bill.

As negotiations on the reconciliation package continue, some members of Congress are pushing for some provisions to be scaled back. Congressional leaders are working to put together a framework in order to move both major infrastructure packages forward by the end of October.

The Build Back Better Act currently includes many priorities the Epilepsy Foundation strongly supports and wants to remain in the package, including funding for Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS), a
Medicare Part D out-of-pocket cap, policies to improve access to and affordability of coverage, coverage for people in states that have not expanded Medicaid, the creation of a paid family and medical leave program, and expanding Medicare coverage to include vision, dental, and hearing benefits. Last week, for instance, the Foundation along with over 30 national patient advocacy organizations sent a letter to congressional leadership urging them to close the Medicaid coverage gap by retaining expansion incentives for states and making permanent premium subsidies for Marketplace plans.

Until a top line number for the reconciliation package has been agreed to, many of these health care priorities are in jeopardy of being cut out of the bill. Take action today to ensure that Congress includes $400 billion for Medicaid HCBS!

Over 30 Organizations Seek Guidance from CDC on COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters and Additional Doses

This week, the Epilepsy Foundation along with 30 other disability rights organizations, sent a letter the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) seeking guidance on vaccine boosters and additional doses for people with disabilities and chronic conditions. A recent report published earlier this month from the CDC found that compared with adults without a disability, those with a disability had a lower likelihood of having received a COVID-19 vaccine, despite being less likely to report hesitancy about getting vaccinated. The letter emphasizes how recent guidance on boosters and additional doses has been confusing for the disability community, which still faces barriers to receiving an initial dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The coalition of groups request more detailed, accessible guidance and outreach from the CDC to people with compromised immune systems on the need for an additional dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine; more detailed guidance and education on the high risk conditions for which people are recommended to get a booster dose of Pfizer; and further publicizing and encouraging states to adopt a broad definition of long-term care settings to be included in the recommendation for residents and workers to get a booster dose. Learn more about COVID-19 boosters and additional doses.

Open Enrollment for Medicare and Marketplace Plans

People seeking to enroll, renew, update, or change their Medicare or Marketplace plan must do so during open enrollment unless a specific exception occurs like getting married, moving out of state, or losing health coverage. Each year, plans make changes to benefits and costs, and new plans are available. Therefore, your current plan may or may not be the best
plan for you in 2022. It is very important to use the open enrollment time-period to compare your coverage choices and find the plan that best meets your health care needs at an affordable cost.

The annual open enrollment period for Medicare prescription drug coverage (part D) and Medicare Advantage (part C) began on October 15, 2021 and will run through December 7, 2021 for coverage beginning January 1, 2022. Visit Medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to learn more (TTY users can call 1-877-486-2048). Read our 2022 Medicare Part D Open Enrollment FAQ Brochure.

The open enrollment period for the Health Insurance Marketplace begins November 1, 2021 and will run through January 15, 2022. For coverage beginning January 1, 2022, you must enroll by December 15, 2021. Coverage will begin February 1, 2022, if you sign up for a plan after December 15th and by the deadline. Learn more about your options at HealthCare.gov or call the toll-free Marketplace call center at 1-800-318-2596 (TTY: 1-855-889-4325) available 24 hours a day. 7 days a week (except holidays). Individuals may be eligible for premium tax credits that will help make coverage more affordable.

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