

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Health Ranking Member Anna Eshoo

Hearing on “Fiscal Year 2024 Department of Health and Human Services Budget.”

March 29, 2023

Good morning Secretary Becerra, and welcome back to the Health Subcommittee. You are always welcome here.

My thanks to you and the Biden Administration for your work over the past year to improve our nation’s health care system.

Premiums under the Affordable Care Act are at an all-time low and enrollment is at an all-time high. And I say bravo. A record-breaking 16.3 million Americans signed up for health coverage under the ACA, including more than 3.6 million Americans who are newly insured, and 4 out of 5 enrollees qualify for plans that cost \$10 or less a month.

These are stunning figures and while there may not be applause on one side of the aisle here, I think there is applause across the country from the American people who are very proud of that.

We’ve also made progress on fighting the fentanyl overdose crisis. The number of providers able to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder has increased by 19% and naloxone prescriptions filled in pharmacies has increased by 37% in the past year alone. For six months in a row, there has been a steady decrease or flattening in overdose deaths. No one can be satisfied with whatever the number is, but that the number is decreasing is an improvement. And why? Because access to treatment saves lives.

President Biden’s fiscal year 2024 budget request builds on these achievements and addresses the remaining gaps in our healthcare system.

To continue lowering costs, the budget proposes making permanent the enhanced premium tax credits that were extended to 2025 in the Inflation Reduction Act, expands surprise billing protections to ground ambulances, and caps the monthly cost of insulin at \$35 for Americans with group and individual market coverage. If we get that through, everyone in the country, whether they are young, middle-aged, or Medicare beneficiaries, will enjoy that critical benefit of capping insulin at \$35 a month.

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Importantly, the budget provides a historic \$46.1 billion to address the overdose crisis. This funding will go toward efforts to get people the evidence-based care they need, reduce the supply of illicit drugs like fentanyl, and go after drug traffickers to stop overdose deaths.

The President's budget outlines a strategy to use over \$13.8 billion to improve our nation's mental health, including increasing the availability of crisis care and achieving full parity, which we have struggled with, between physical and mental health care coverage.

The budget also invests \$50.5 billion in pandemic preparedness, including \$20 billion in mandatory funding to prevent and address current and emerging public health threats.

Finally, President Biden has proposed increasing the Medicare tax rate to 5% for those making over \$400,000 per year and closing loopholes. These reforms will make the Medicare Trust Fund solvent beyond 2050 to ensure older Americans can retire with dignity and security.

Instead of looking toward the future, I hear that House Republican Leadership reportedly want to cut 2024 discretionary spending back to the 2022 level. These cuts would decrease access to the essential government functions each of our constituents rely on.

I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Secretary, on the impact of these cuts and working with you to develop a budget to build on the progress of the past two years to improve our nation's health and well-being. When people are healthy, we have a stronger nation, so we have a responsibility to keep investing in that. Thank you for your instructive testimony