

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
Of  
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2023 HHS Budget”***

**April 27, 2022**

I am pleased to have Secretary Becerra before us today to discuss the Biden Administration’s fiscal year 2023 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Budgets are an expression of our values. The annual budget process provides us with an opportunity to review and consider the priorities of the Administration. That is why I am pleased that this budget proposal puts resources towards the programs and agencies that help improve lives, prepare us for the future, and protect the health and well-being of all Americans.

The funding priorities in this budget provide a roadmap to continue to get back on track in the wake of the pandemic, to keep fighting COVID-19, continue making health care more affordable and accessible for all Americans, to improve our country’s response to mental health challenges, and to address deep and persistent health inequities.

The impact and ongoing response to COVID-19 has helped to crystalize the importance of adequately funding public health and I am pleased the budget makes critical investments in our public health infrastructure to ensure the federal government has the resources it needs. The budget increases funding for each of the agencies within HHS that are involved in pandemic response.

The work of these agencies has allowed Americans to return to a semblance of normalcy. I am immensely proud of the Biden Administration’s work to undertake the largest free vaccine program in our country’s history and, as a result of their efforts, three out of four Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine. This has reduced hospitalizations and health care spending, and most importantly, saved millions of lives.

We are also in the midst of a mental health and substance use disorder crisis. Our country continues to be devastated by overdoses driven by the widespread availability of opioids and stimulants in the drug supply, such as fentanyl and methamphetamines. I’m glad to see that the budget prioritizes funding for programs and services to address this and acknowledges the connection between mental health and substance use. The budget increases access to prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services. Each of these are critical components to effectively address substance use.

Without question, the Biden Administration’s actions have dramatically improved access to health insurance coverage, and I want to commend Secretary Becerra for the tremendous

progress HHS has made in helping people get affordable, high-quality health care. During the 2022 Open Enrollment Period, a historic 14.5 million people enrolled in health care coverage. Because of the success of the American Rescue Plan, families have seen lower premiums and the national uninsured rate is near historic lows.

Despite these gains, there are still significant gaps in the health care safety net in the states that continue to refuse to expand Medicaid. Closing the coverage gap for uninsured people remains a priority and the House has taken action to ensure that low-income Americans in every state will have access to quality, affordable health care.

I am also pleased the budget prioritizes investments in health equity across HHS, including funding for a number of critical maternal health programs that will reduce inequities that have long persisted in maternal health outcomes.

Finally, the budget also reiterates the Administration's commitment to reducing prescription drug prices and calls on Congress to pass legislation that aligns with the principles included in the Administration's Comprehensive Plan for Addressing High Drug Prices.

Americans pay, on average, three to four times more for the same drug as those in other countries and we continue to watch drug prices increase year after year, as our constituents struggle to afford the medications they need to stay healthy. This House has taken action to give the Secretary of HHS the ability to negotiate for lower drug prices, cap out-of-pocket costs in Medicare Part D, and stop drug price increases at the rate of inflation.

It is imperative that these policies become law as soon as possible and I am pleased that President Biden shares our commitment to reducing drug costs and saving American consumers money.

Thank you, Secretary Becerra, for being here today. I look forward to hearing from you on the Administration's priorities and appreciate HHS's ongoing work to ensure the health and well-being of the American people.