



## Policy Brief

March 19, 2021



### American Rescue Plan Signed—What Comes Next?

Last week, President Biden [signed](#) a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package into law. Key health care provisions that made it into the legislation include grants for behavioral health and funding to expand the U.S. public health workforce. Measures not included in the bill were the suspension of the Medicare sequestration cuts and loan forgiveness for accelerated payments. There may be opportunities to include these measures in other legislation in the future. President Biden is now expected to pivot to a "[Build Back Better](#)" plan, which will aim at supporting the U.S. economic recovery through infrastructure investments. For key highlights from the recently passed COVID-19 relief package, click [here](#). For more on what's in President Biden's COVID-19 relief package and his "Build Back Better" plan, see below.

#### Key Measures Included in the COVID-19 Relief Package

The final key health care provisions [included](#) in the package are:

- \$330 million to HHS for new and existing graduate medical residency training programs
- \$420 million for certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic grants
- \$40 million to HHS and HRSA to promote mental health with health care entities, including Federally Qualified Health Centers
- \$7.66 billion for HHS to expand the U.S. public health workforce
- \$100 million for the Medical Reserve Corps
- \$7.6 billion for community health centers
- \$8.5 billion for rural health care providers

## Measures Not Included in the Package

While the package was passed along party lines, there were [several provisions](#) that Republicans were able to keep out of the package. The provision to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour was removed, as well as two transportation infrastructure measures. Additional provider funding measures were not included in the final bill, including loan forgiveness for Medicare accelerated payments or increasing the Provider Relief Fund. However, we expect future congressional efforts to achieve these goals, such as [H.R.1868](#), a bill to suspend Medicare sequestration cuts.

## What comes next?

With the COVID-19 relief bill originally promised by President Biden on the campaign trail now passed, experts believe he will turn his sights toward rebuilding the U.S. economy after COVID-19. President Biden has [promised](#) a "Build Back Better" plan that proposes spending at least \$4 trillion over 10 years on infrastructure and renewable energy, which would help generate millions of jobs, reduce inequalities and help battle climate change. With senior Democratic leaders supporting this direction, we expect President Biden to propose his plan within the next several weeks.



## Biden Administration Makes New Advances in War on Child Poverty

President Biden's *American Rescue Plan* created potentially the most impactful financial safety net for children since President Lyndon B. Johnson first [declared war](#) on poverty. Nestled within the latest pandemic relief package is a provision establishing essentially a guaranteed income of up to \$300 per month for low and middle-class families with children. The provision works by expanding an existing tax credit and has the potential to lift more than [four million children](#) out of poverty. While the initial payments are only for 2021, both [President Biden](#) and some [Republican colleagues](#) have expressed interest in making this new social safety net program permanent.

## What do American policy experts mean by the "social safety net?"

The term "social safety net" refers to the suite of federal programs that protect and improve the wellness of the most financially vulnerable. Some of these programs provide direct cash assistance, while others give subsidies to make [food](#), [housing](#) or [health care](#) more affordable.

More than half of all U.S. households receive support from at least one safety net program. The new *American Rescue Plan* will extend cash payments to all but the most affluent families with children.

### **Which families are eligible for this expanded financial support?**

During 2021, families making [under \\$150,000](#) will be eligible for monthly payments of up to \$300 per child, through an expansion of the existing child tax credit. Instead of being issued on the annual tax return, the IRS plans to make periodic payments to families from July through December. For the first time, this credit will be extended in full to the poorest households, those making under \$11,000 a year (for example, a single parent who has lost their job and had to move in with family). Previously, parents whose earnings were too low were excluded from this benefit.

### **What long-term impacts might this have on kids' health and wellness?**

The first phase only establishes this guaranteed income for children through the end of the year. If made permanent, the provision has the potential to reduce childhood malnutrition, increase housing security, and improve access to schools and extra-curricular activities. These improvements would be greatest for children currently living in [deep poverty](#), who often have the greatest exposure to [childhood trauma](#) and violence.



### **Health and Humanitarian Crisis: Immigration Issues Take Center Stage**

A looming problem for the Biden Administration is the recent resurgence of activity at the U.S. southern border. Since the inauguration, an increasing number of undocumented immigrants have reached the U.S. border seeking asylum and a better life for themselves. Notably, there has been a rise in the number of [unaccompanied minors](#) arriving on American soil. The Biden Administration has [signaled](#) that they will not be turning away unaccompanied minors, which has raised concerns about minor detention centers being used in the same capacity as the Trump Administration. The U.S. is still struggling to beat the COVID-19 pandemic; some worry this increased border activity could exacerbate the situation and have long-term public health effects.

## **President Biden's Immigration Policy Changes**

The Biden Administration has already begun redefining U.S. immigration policy. President Biden has requested to eliminate the [Trump-era Public Charge Rule](#), reversed the 'Wait in Mexico' policy and implemented a 100-day moratorium on deportations. Some immigrants may take the Biden Administration's loosening of immigration restrictions to mean that border crossings will be more successful than under President Trump. [U.S officials stated](#) that smugglers are likely spreading this misinformation to migrants for ill-intentioned profits. As of February 28<sup>th</sup>, the [HHS Refugee Office](#) had approximately 7,700 unaccompanied minors in custody.

### **What's the current situation in minor detention centers?**

The Biden Administration has reopened minor detention centers, [notably](#) the Carrizo Springs facility in Texas, originally opened by President Trump. There are plans to reopen the for-profit detention center in Homestead, Florida, as well. [Reports detail](#) overcrowding at these detention centers, leading to public health concerns and [bipartisan criticism](#) of the Biden Administration.

### **What are the implications on public health?**

There are physical and mental health concerns associated with the usage of detention centers. The continuous flow of people creates a breeding ground for the [spread of disease](#) and illness, which is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and raises concerns for immigrants and the general public. There are also concerns for the [mental health](#) of detained children. The trauma they are experiencing during this ordeal can have lasting effects on their mental health and development, leaving them vulnerable to mental illnesses, chronic diseases and substance use disorders later in life.

### **What are federal and state governments doing to help?**

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has [enlisted](#) FEMA to help with the growing number of migrant children arriving at the border. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, the Biden Administration [lifted](#) COVID-19 related shelter capacity rules on facilities that house minors to allow for more space. In response to recent activity at the border, Texas Governor Greg Abbott [launched](#) Operation Lone Star, a move that mobilizes the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the National Guard to the southern border. Representative Vicente Gonzales (D-TX) has [called upon](#) the Biden Administration to reform the immigration system as Texas continues to deal with swelling numbers.

## **Updates to COVID-19 Regulations**

AHPA continues to follow new COVID-19 regulations, guidance and other government actions. The updates below are the latest guidance and other developments since March 8<sup>th</sup> to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. For earlier COVID-19 regulations and guidance, visit the previous [Policy Brief](#).

## New CMS Guidelines for Nursing Home Visitation Measures

- CMS has released [updated measures](#) for nursing home visitations. The new guidelines include measures for vaccinated individuals and new guidelines for indoor visitations.

## Biden-Harris Administration Increases Medicare Payments for COVID-19 Vaccines

- CMS is [increasing](#) the Medicare payment amount for administering the COVID-19 vaccine. The new and higher payment rate will support actions taken by providers that are designed to increase the number of vaccines being supplied.

## Updated Coverage and Reimbursement Measures

- CMS has released an [update](#) for coverage and reimbursement of vaccines, vaccine administration and cost sharing under Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

## Latest Leadership Nominees for the Biden Administration

Hearings have begun for many of the Biden Administration's top choices for health-related leadership roles. Just yesterday, Xavier Becerra was [confirmed](#) to lead Health and Human Services. Here's what else we know so far:

Leadership Position	Nominee	Status
<i>Director</i> <b>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</b>	<b>Dr. Rochelle Walensky</b>	<i>Confirmed</i>
<i>Surgeon General</i> <b>Health and Human Services</b>	<b>Dr. Vivek Murthy</b>	<i>Hearings in Progress</i>
<i>Secretary</i> <b>Health and Human Services</b>	<b>Mr. Xavier Becerra</b>	<i>Confirmed</i>
<i>Assistant Secretary</i> <b>Health and Human Services</b>	<b>Dr. Rachel Leland Levine</b>	<i>Hearings in Progress</i>
<i>Administrator</i> <b>Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services</b>	<b>Ms. Chiquita Brooks-LaSure</b>	<i>Confirmation Still Needed</i>
<i>Director</i> <b>Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation</b>	<b>Dr. Liz Fowler</b>	<i>No Confirmation Needed</i>

## MedPAC Releases March Report to Congress

This week, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) released a [report](#) with recommendations to policy makers on telehealth, Medicare Advantage and [Medicare payments](#). Among the recommendations was for CMS to extend the current COVID-19 telehealth flexibilities for two years beyond the pandemic in order to collect data on the cost of providing these services. MedPAC also stated that it does not anticipate any long-term effects related to the public health emergency that would warrant changing the annual update to Medicare's fee schedule for 2022. Although policy makers are not required to adopt MedPAC's recommendations, these are always taken into consideration. For an outline of all recommendations, view page 511 of the [report](#).



### AHPA Resources

**Need an easy way to keep tabs on President Biden's Executive Orders?** AHPA is keeping a running list of the latest Executive Orders coming out of the White House. Click [here](#) to download.

## IN OTHER NEWS

[Empathy is Key to Addressing Minorities' Vaccine Mistrust](#), Dr. Alric Simmonds, AdventHealth – Orlando Sentinel

[Becerra's HHS Nomination Advances](#) – Politico

[Biden Administration to Invest \\$150 Million for COVID-19 Treatments in Underserved Communities](#) – HHS

[Urban Institute Projects American Rescue Plan Act Will Significantly Reduce U.S. Poverty Rates](#) – National Low-Income Housing Coalition

[HR 1, Democrats' Massive Voting Rights Bill, Explained](#) – Vox