



Policy Brief

June 11, 2021



What's in President Biden's \$6T Proposed Budget?

Last week, the White House released President Biden's [proposed budget](#) for fiscal year 2022. The sweeping proposal includes investments in the economy, education and public health, as well as changes to the American tax code. President Biden hopes that his proposed budget will strengthen the economy and “lay the foundation for shared prosperity” for all Americans. The budget will now move to Congress for negotiations, where it will likely change substantially before being signed into law. For more on the proposal, what it tells us about the President's priorities and what may happen next, keep reading.

What's in the President's proposal?

President Biden's proposal would usher in the longest sustained period of governmental spending in more than 50 years. Included in the proposal are the previously-released American Jobs and American Families Plans, which focus on human and built infrastructure. The budget also extends additional funds to create a new health research agency that would be tasked with tackling major public health priorities like cancer research, gun violence, homelessness and the opioid crisis. The proposal calls for an \$8 trillion increase in spending by 2031; a price to be paid by raising taxes on corporations and the wealthiest individuals.

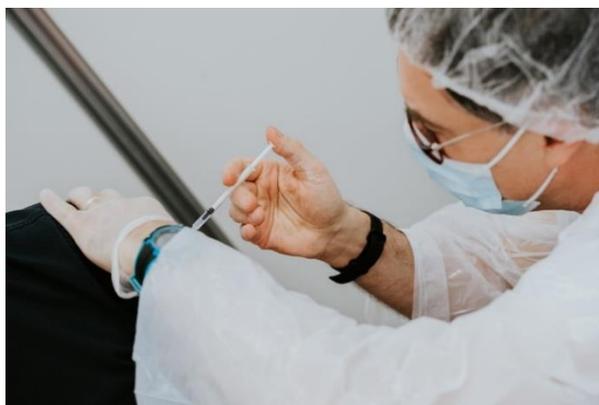
What does it reveal about White House priorities?

The President has expressed his desire to make the U.S. more competitive—particularly against [rivals like China](#)—through increased support for education, social safety net programs like nutrition assistance and strategic investments for future generations. President Biden hopes that the country can prevent future economic and social crises by investing more in health care, [the](#)

[environment](#) and the financial health of the middle class. Not everyone agrees with the proposal; many Republican colleagues are [unhappy](#) that the budget [does not include](#) the [Hyde Amendment](#), which governs federal funding of abortion services, and worry that the budget's large price tag is too aggressive for the economy to withstand.

What's next for the \$6T spending package?

The presidential budget is still just a proposal. From here, it heads to Congress for consideration. In his letter to Congress, President Biden acknowledged the budget's large price tag but stressed that it "is a budget that reflects that trickle-down economics have never worked, and that the best way to grow our economy is not from the top down, but from the bottom up and middle out." The President hopes that his argument will be compelling—he needs at least 10 Republican votes to pass the spending packages without resorting to [budget reconciliation](#).



The Latest on COVID-19 Vaccinations

President Biden is redoubling his efforts to increase vaccination rates, both domestically and globally. He easily surpassed his initial goal of 100 million shots within the first 100 days of his presidency. Reaching the rest of the nation, some of whom are hesitant to receive the vaccine, may be more difficult. The White House's campaign [efforts](#) will now include incentives to boost vaccination rates ranging from [free childcare](#) to sports tickets. While President believes that he can reach his vaccination goal through voluntary action, continued hesitancy has sparked a discussion on the legality of private industries mandating vaccines.

An Update on Vaccine Distribution

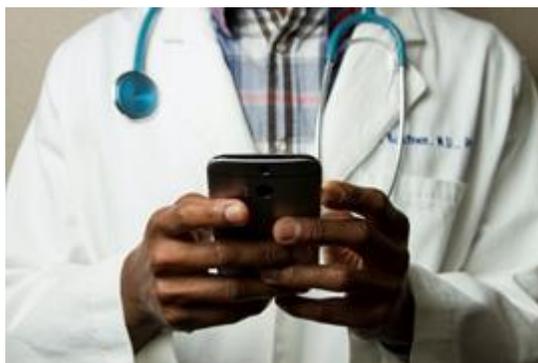
There are currently 12 states that have already reached the President's new [goal](#) of 70% of vaccinated adults. APHA states with some of the highest vaccination rates across their entire population include Hawaii (67.8%), California (58.1%), Illinois (56.1%), Colorado (55.3%) and Wisconsin (51.8%). As vaccine rates are going up, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have been [falling](#). Some [research](#) attributes this to the vaccinations. This trend may continue as the FDA has recently [approved](#) Emergency Use Authorizations (EUAs) for individuals as young as 12. Pfizer and Moderna have also [requested](#) that the FDA formally approve their vaccine, which may further increase vaccination rates.

White House Actions

Last week, President Biden [announced](#) a "month of action" to reach his new goal of vaccinating 70% of all adults with at least one dose by July 4th. In areas with low-vaccination rates, President Biden has begun community-based outreach [efforts](#), like partnering with Black-owned businesses and robust media campaigns. The Biden Administration is not only focused on increasing vaccination rates domestically; they have also begun efforts to make vaccines available globally. President Biden gave his [support](#) to waiving the intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines so that other countries could manufacture them. The White House has also been [deliberating](#) on whether to send soon-to-expire vaccines overseas that are less likely to be used with the remaining vaccine-hesitant Americans.

Will Vaccines Ever Be Mandatory?

Despite the President's efforts, vaccine hesitancy continues to remain a barrier in reaching the goal of vaccinating 70% of Americans. With the vaccines approaching full FDA approval, private industries are already discussing whether they can legally require vaccinations. Several court [cases](#) have disputed mandated vaccinations; there have already been legal [recommendations](#) that could allow states and private companies to do so. We still anticipate that rates will remain varied throughout the country depending on the level of vaccine hesitancy in that area.



Is Telehealth Here to Stay?

No Word from Congress, but States are Making Moves

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health emergency (PHE) ushered in rapid changes to the U.S. health care system. While telehealth has been around for some years, regulatory obstacles and reimbursement challenges prevented it from being widely adopted. Following the [PHE designation](#), several of the barriers such as Medicare reimbursement and [insurance coverage](#) were temporarily resolved, allowing many patients to access medical services from their own homes without physically visiting a facility. While telehealth has bipartisan support, little has been done on the federal level to make telehealth permanent. Where Congress has stalled, States have picked up the slack and are moving forward with legislation to improve access to telehealth services post-PHE. To learn more about telehealth's benefits, what States are doing and how the federal government might respond, keep reading.

Why is telehealth essential, and what are the criticisms?

Telehealth has many [benefits](#), including cost savings, convenience and the ability to provide care to people with mobility limitations or those in rural areas who don't have access to a local doctor or clinic. Although telehealth has many benefits, there are some questions regarding its long-term implementation, including the security of personal health data, fraud concerns, limited possibilities in treatment options and insurance coverage [issues](#), which has historically not included telehealth services. Likewise, questions arise regarding the equitable shortcomings of telehealth for individuals without adequate broadband connection or proper technological equipment to utilize said services. These critiques and the relative novelty of telehealth's widespread use have left Congress questioning how to move forward.

What are States doing to advance the prevalence of telehealth?

States are [leading](#) the way in passing legislation to ensure that telehealth will stay after the PHE. More than a dozen states have already moved to solidify telehealth rules. For example:

- **Texas** lawmakers unanimously [approved](#) a bill to extend the coverage of telehealth and audio-only services permanently.
- **Kansas** [approved](#) legislation to allow licensed out-of-state physicians to practice telemedicine in-state with a waiver.
- **Arkansas** signed a law that [ensures](#) residents maintain the ability to seek care through convenient, accessible and cost-effective virtual care modalities following the PHE conclusion.

Are States creating a roadmap for the federal government to follow?

The federal government has been [contemplating](#) legislation to ensure that the barriers removed by the PHE designation do not once again return to obstruct its progress. The Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies ([CONNECT](#)) for Health Act of 2021 would eliminate geographic restrictions on telehealth, allow federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics to provide telehealth after the PHE, and encourage CMS to test payment models for telehealth. However, the newness of widespread telehealth and the lack of data on the long-term impact is giving Congress cold feet. In the future, State actions could provide Congress with a better understanding of the ramifications of telehealth as they wait for more clarity. To support this work, AHPA serves on the [Partnership to Advance Virtual Care](#) as a founding member.

UnitedHealthcare Announces Retrospective Denials for Select ED Visits

In an effort to curb non-emergent ED utilization, UnitedHealthcare (UHC) has [announced](#) a new coverage policy for enrollees presenting at a hospital ED. Starting July 1st, UHC will reserve the right to retroactively apply “no coverage or limited coverage” for claims that the insurer determines were not for true emergencies. According to the policy briefing released by UHC, the insurer will consider multiple factors including the initial cause of the patient’s presentation at the ED, the diagnostic services they received and complicating factors like chronic conditions.

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 May 31st to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. For earlier COVID-19 regulations and guidance, visit the previous Policy Briefs.

Informational Bulletin: Changes to Medicaid and CHIP Following American Rescue Plan

The Center for Medicaid & CHIP Services (CMCS) [released](#) an informational bulletin detailing the status of Medicaid, CHIP and Basic Health Programs (BHP) following the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

EEOC Says Law Does Not Prevent Employers from Requiring Vaccinations for Return to Work

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) [released](#) their updated and expanded guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A key takeaway is that federal EEO law does not prevent an employer from requiring all employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 before returning to work.

Letter from HHS to Providers and Insurers on COVID-19

HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra recently sent a letter to insurers and providers following recent reports of ongoing concerns about Americans facing costs associated with COVID-19 vaccinations or testing, which are currently free to consumers. The letter reminds health insurers and providers that charging consumers for the provision of COVID-19 vaccinations and tests may result in enforcement actions. To read the letter, click [here](#).



AHPA Resources

Rule Summary: IPPS FY 2022

- [IPPS FY 2022 Proposed Rule Summary](#)

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.

WHAT WE'RE READING...

[Why Democrats' Ambitions for Health Care Are Shrinking Rapidly](#) – Vox

[American Telemedicine Association: Policy Halftime Report](#) – ATA

[How Medical Jargon Can Make COVID Health Disparities Even Worse](#) – NPR

[Senate Confirms Clarke as First Black Woman to Lead DOJ Civil Rights](#) – The Hill