



Policy Brief

October 1, 2021



Back in Session: What Congress is Working on this Fall

Congress just [passed](#) a Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the government temporarily funded until December 3rd and aims to raise the U.S. debt limit by October 18th in order to avoid [defaulting](#) for the first time in U.S. history. In addition to the latest government funding, Congress will also be focusing on a budget reconciliation package, a "hard" infrastructure bill and completing Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 appropriations. As of September 30th, a vote has not been taken on any of these legislative packages. Democrats hope to stay unified, but there has been strong disagreement in the party, particularly surrounding the strategy in passing the [infrastructure bill](#). Even if some proposed measures aren't ultimately included in the infrastructure bill, there is a chance that some may be included in the forthcoming appropriations package.

Congressional Democrats are using the budget reconciliation process to pass key provisions.

Due to their slim majority, Congressional Democrats could not pass President Biden's Build Back Better plan to address both "hard" and "social" infrastructure. Instead, they passed a FY 2022 [budget resolution](#) that authorized \$3.5 trillion of increased spending over the next 10 years, which can be passed by a simple majority through the [budget reconciliation](#) process. The legislation being considered contains some [measures](#) of President Biden's Build Back Better Agenda, including:

- Universal Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML)
- Automatic IRA or retirement plans
- Universal prekindergarten and two years of free community college

- Lowering drug prices through [drug price negotiation](#)
- Permanently enhancing ACA subsidies
- Closing the Medicaid [expansion gap](#)
- Extending Medicaid post-partum coverage for up to one year

What else is Congress working on this fall?

After the budget reconciliation bill, Congress will focus on the FY 2022 appropriations package. While there are still many discussions to be had, the House has already [passed](#) several bills to be included in the final appropriations package. Measures that are being considered include:

- Increasing funding for childcare and child development programs, like Head Start
- Strengthening biomedical research by increasing funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and establishing the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health
- Bolstering public health infrastructure and capacity by funding the CDC, state and local health departments
- Providing funding for maternal and mental health, gun violence, substance misuse and health disparities reduction
- Expanding nutrition programs to tackle food insecurity
- Confronting the climate crisis by creating more clean energy jobs
- Providing opportunities for homeownership and rental assistance



Protecting Children from COVID-19

A new group of Americans might soon have [access](#) to the COVID-19 vaccine as Pfizer concluded their vaccine is safe and effective for children ages 5 to 11. The drugmaker plans to submit for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA); this approval could come in the following weeks. The authorization could be welcome news for parents and caregivers concerned about their children, as CDC data show a recent uptick in adolescents catching the disease. Keep reading to learn more about the impact that COVID-19 has on children and the vaccination effort for adolescents.

COVID-19's Impact on Children

COVID-19 cases among children have drastically [increased](#) over the past month, with approximately 1 million cases reported, accounting for 25% of all weekly COVID-19 infections. Fortunately, hospitalizations and mortality rates among [children](#) are low, with .01% – 2.0% of cases resulting in hospitalization and a fatality rate of 0.00% – 0.03%. Studies also show that a sizeable number of children that contract COVID-19 could [develop](#) lasting symptoms and suffer from long-COVID. Symptoms include fatigue, muscle and joint pain, insomnia, respiratory problems and heart palpitations and have been shown to persist for more than 120 days.

Vaccination Efforts

COVID-19 vaccinations were [approved](#) for use in adolescents aged 12 – 15 on May 12th. To date, only 34% of that age group are fully [vaccinated](#), which is low compared to other age groups. If this trend continues moving forward, we could see the youngest portion of our nation being the least vaccinated. While severe conditions, hospitalization and death are rare for adolescents, there are concerns about youth spreading the disease and extending the length of the pandemic. Additionally, the longer the disease can propagate, the greater the chance is of new variants developing.



White House Announces New Plan to Address Housing Shortage

Health scientists have known for decades—people with stable housing have [better health outcomes](#) than people without. On September 1st, the White House announced a [new initiative](#) that it hopes will help increase Americans' access to safe and affordable housing. The newly-proposed policy would limit the sale of many new homes to individuals and nonprofits, rather than to investors and big corporations (which bought one of every six homes sold in the second quarter of this year). Through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Biden Administration hopes to reserve [nearly 100,000 homes](#) for homeowners and renters over the next three years, with priority given to lower- and middle-income purchasers.

Housing and health are inextricably linked.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, most Americans spent [about 90%](#) of their time indoors, with about two-thirds of that time being spent at home. Having a permanent, affordable home that is safe improves the mental and physical health of the persons living in it. Housing is just one of the social determinants of health—the conditions in which we live, work, play and pray—but it has a [powerful influence](#) on each person’s ability to be healthy. Living in a poor-quality home or experiencing homelessness increases a person’s risk of chronic disease and injury, and can [interfere](#) with childhood development.

The White House hopes to partner with HUD to improve access to housing, which could also improve overall public health.

President Biden’s announcement directs HUD to develop guidelines over the next year for an “exclusive listing period.” During this period, only individuals, non-profits, and local or state governments would be allowed to submit bids for homes insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). FHA-insured homes are specifically targeted to low- and middle-income borrowers. The plan would also allow housing nonprofits to access increased grant funding to build affordable housing.

The new regulations could help, but the housing shortage is a complex problem.

Wealthy investors and corporations buying a large portion of homes is only one factor in the shortage. The rising cost of building materials, labor shortages, zoning policy and, lately, the COVID-19 pandemic have [all contributed](#) to there being not enough housing to meet the public’s need. Approximately 72 million millennials have now reached the age range for home buying but, unfortunately, there simply are not enough affordable homes on the market. As supply lags, prices continue to rise, making buying a home impossible for millions around the country.

Requirements Related to Surprise Billing; Part 2

Yesterday afternoon, HHS released an [interim final rule](#) for requirements related to surprise billing; part 2. This rule establishes new protections from surprise billing and excessive cost sharing for consumers receiving health care items and services. Key provisions include the independent dispute resolution process, good faith estimates for uninsured (or self-pay) individuals, the patient-provider dispute resolution process, and expanded rights to external review. A summary of this new rule will be shared in the next Policy Brief.

[AHPA Summary of the previously-issued rule](#) | [HHS Announcement](#)

COVID-19 Booster Shot Confusion

Last month has been a whirlwind for those trying to understand the federal government's policy towards booster shots. Initially, President Biden [announced](#) during his September 9th address that vaccine booster shots would be coming soon. The White House was dealt a setback on September 17th when a government advisory panel [rejected](#) across-the-board booster shots; instead, they endorsed extra vaccine doses only for the elderly and those at high risk. The back-and-forth came to a head on September 24th, when the CDC director partially [overruled](#) the advisory panel and added that individuals at risk of infection because of their jobs should also be eligible. As of now, COVID-19 vaccine boosters will be [available](#) six months after the completion of the initial vaccination for Americans over the age of 65, people in nursing homes, people with underlying medical conditions and people with jobs that put them at high risk of infection.

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 September 18th to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

CDC Widens Eligibility for COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters

The CDC partially [overruled](#) an agency advisory panel's decision to limit boosters to those 65 and older or at high-risk. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky's overruling will expand access to boosters to people at risk of on-the-job COVID-19 infection.

HRSA Gives Hospitals 60-Day Grace Period on COVID-19 Relief Fund Reporting

HRSA is [giving](#) hospitals a 60-day grace period for the first round of provider relief fund reporting. The September 30th deadline will remain, but the agency will not initiate enforcement actions from October 1st to November 30th.



AHPA Resources

Missed an AHPA webinar lately? No problem!

Visit AHPA's [YouTube channel](#), where members can stream webinars

Regulatory Resources

Below is a list of the recent regulatory work that AHPA has conducted.

- OSHA ETS [AHPA Comment](#)
- Surprise Billing [Regulatory Summary](#) | [AHPA Comment](#) | [Comment Summaries](#)
- IPPS [Regulatory Summary](#) | [AHPA Comment](#) | [Comment Summaries](#)
- PFS [Regulatory Summary](#) | [AHPA Comment](#) | [Comment Summaries](#)
- OPFS [Regulatory Summary](#) | [AHPA Comment](#) | [Comment Summaries](#)

WHAT WE'RE READING...

[Who is Suing Over New York's Vaccine Mandate?](#) – Washington Post

[Nine High-Stakes Issues SCOTUS Will Take Up This Coming Term](#) – Vox

[How France Overcame COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy](#) – The Wall Street Journal

[A day-by-day guide to Congress's high-stakes budget week](#) – The Seattle Times

[President Joe Biden's Migration Troubles](#) – Politico