



Health Policy Briefing

August 14, 2017

President Classifies Opioid Epidemic as National Emergency

The Trump Administration made a number of announcements in regard to the opioid crisis last week. During a briefing featuring first lady Melania Trump, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tom Price, Acting Director of White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Richard Baum, Trump Chief of Staff John Kelly and advisers Kellyanne Conway and Jared Kushner, the President classified the opioid crisis as a national emergency. Based on the recommendations from the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis interim report, the White House instructed federal agencies to use any appropriate emergency and other authority to respond to the epidemic. Secretary Price stated that ensuring widespread access to overdose reversing medication as well as review of opioid alternative painkillers by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are two priorities for the Administration. The Department is also examining privacy regulations to determine whether they can be made less onerous in cases of an overdose. The White House stressed that it is working to stop the movement of fentanyl into the U.S. and to increase federal drug prosecutions. It is also looking at ways to reduce the number of pills prescribed and the length of painkiller prescriptions.

CMS Releases Report on Insurer Exchange Participation

More than 40 percent of counties across the country could have only one insurer on its health insurance exchange in 2018. In an **analysis** released last week, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) predicts that 1,409 counties representing 2.5 million exchange participants will have only one insurance carrier. In addition, 17 counties are projected to have no issuer, leaving 9,595 Americans without coverage.

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Premium Rate Request Deadline Extended to September 5

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is providing health insurers with an additional three weeks to submit premium rate requests for plans sold on the federal exchange. The deadline has been extended until September 5. According to a new **report** from the Kaiser Family Foundation, premiums for 2018 plans on the exchange could see increases of up to 49 percent. The analysis indicates that market uncertainty is driving the steep rate hikes. In related news, congressional offices have been notified that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) will release a report next week analyzing the effects of halting the 2010 health care law's cost-sharing reduction (CSR) payments, which could have the effect of further destabilizing the market.

Roe Declared Cancer Free

Representative Phil Roe (R-Tenn.) has been declared cancer-free, following a medical procedure late last month. Rep. Roe was diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer in July. Rep. Roe is an OB/GYN and the co-chair of the House GOP Doctors Caucus.

Health Care Remains the Subject of Recess Debate

President Trump and White House officials spent much of last week criticizing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) for his failure to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), while continuing to pressure him to move health care reform following the August recess. Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tom Price stated in an interview that the onus for health care reform remains on Congress. Price, however, refrained from using the rhetoric of repeal and replace, and instead referred to work on an 'Obamacare fix' when lawmakers return to work in September. Additionally, members of the House Freedom Caucus have filed a petition to force Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) to call a vote on simple repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The discharge petition requires 218 signatures to force a floor vote. The petition already has the support of Republican Study Committee Chairman Mark Walker.