



## Health Policy Briefing

August 24, 2015

### OMB Report on Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations Bills

The House of Representatives' fiscal year 2016 appropriations bills exceed the \$493.5 billion statutory cap on non-defense spending by \$1.8 billion and the \$523 billion cap on defense spending by \$3 million, according to a new report from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Senate appropriations come in at \$1 million over the defense-spending cap. In order to avoid the Administration imposing across the board spending cuts, Congress will have to rework the funding bills and agree upon spending levels at or below the statutory caps. Otherwise, the House, Senate, and White House would have to reach a budget deal that raises the caps, in a manner similar to the 2013 budget agreement negotiated by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.). To date, the House has passed six appropriations bills and marked up the remainder of the twelve spending bills. For the first time in six years, the Senate has marked up all twelve bills, but has not yet considered any on the floor. Senate Democrats have vowed to block any spending bills that adhere to sequestration spending levels, and are joined by the White House in pushing for a new budget deal that raises the caps.

#### *Democrats Continue Push for Budget Negotiations*

With less than two months remaining in this fiscal year, Democrats in the Senate have sent a **letter** to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) urging him to schedule bipartisan budget negotiations immediately. "Inaction and failure to responsibly restore sequester-level cuts in FY 16 appropriations bills will have real consequences for our country," the letter says. "We cannot afford to wait, only to let delay and inaction bring us to the brink of another totally predictable and completely preventable crisis." The letter was signed by all 46 members of the Democratic caucus, including its two independent members.

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### ***PCORI Announces \$56.7 Million in Research Awards***

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) has announced its approval of \$56.7 million to support four pragmatic clinical studies. The studies will examine the safety and effectiveness of antibiotics versus surgery in treating patients with uncomplicated appendicitis; the safety and effectiveness of three blood-thinning drugs used to prevent potentially deadly blood clots in patients undergoing hip and knee replacement; different approaches to getting patients with post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar depression the mental health care they need and two strategies for getting patients in rural and underserved areas the behavioral health care they need to see which works better. The money will also be put towards two obesity research initiatives on weight loss surgery and weight gain caused by antibiotic use in young children. PCORI also approved an additional \$60 million for comparative clinical effectiveness research on the use of new anticoagulant drugs and care of treatment-resistant depression. These topics stem from input received in a multi-stakeholder workshop convened by PCORI in June. Including these new awards, PCORI has spent \$1.08 billion in total on projects aimed at helping patients make better-informed health care choices and employing the capacity of PCORI's national clinical research network known as PCORnet.

### ***Million Hearts Initiative Launches Blood Pressure Challenge***

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched a challenge last week to identify those clinicians and health care teams most responsible for controlling high blood pressure and preventing heart attacks and strokes. This challenge was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in support of the Million Hearts initiative, and will recognize those practices and providers that achieve hypertension control rates of 70 percent or above. HHS' Million Hearts initiative is a national initiative aimed at fighting heart disease and stroke with the goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. The deadline to **submit a nomination** for the challenge is October 31.

### ***HHS to Support Development of Anthrax Vaccine***

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will support clinical studies for a new anthrax vaccine that would be easier and faster to produce than the vaccine currently licensed. The development project will be overseen by the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA). If the vaccine is demonstrated effective in humans, protection against anthrax could occur with fewer doses than the currently licensed vaccine, which must be administered with three doses over the course of four weeks, and requires an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The novel recombinant technology used to produce the new vaccine means that millions of doses could be produced in a comparatively shorter period of time and with lower manufacturing costs.

## **Upcoming Congressional Meetings and Hearings**

***House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health: field hearing titled "Realizing Quality Rural Care Through Appropriate Staffing and Improved Choice;" 10:00 a.m., National Guard Armory, 1170 East Portage Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.; September 1***