



FRIDAY ALERT

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Lobbyists Fight Democratic Proposals on Drug Pricing, Vaccine Access

Pharmaceutical corporations are [preparing for battle](#) as President **Biden** considers whether to waive patent protections on vaccines to help other nations fight the coronavirus and House Democrats write legislation to require Medicare to negotiate the price of drugs.

Pharmaceutical corporations have a long history of successfully keeping Medicare from negotiating drug prices. Industry lobbyists reportedly plan to combine strong public approval following the development of Covid-19 vaccines with their usual power to oppose Democratic priorities that would hurt their profit margin. The drug corporations' trade association, Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), was the third largest spender on lobbying in 2020, investing \$26 million to protect their bottom line.

"PhRMA has had some success in the past and most recently was able to keep H.R.3, the Lower Drug Costs Now Act passed by the Democratic House in 2019, from reaching the Senate floor," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "Now we have another opportunity to allow Medicare to not only negotiate drug prices but also expand the program to include vision, hearing and dental coverage. I expect them to fight us tooth and nail, but Alliance members are prepared to make their voices heard."

American Rescue Plan Can Expand Medicaid in States That Have Refused Funds

The newly enacted American Rescue Plan is dramatically [shifting the debate](#) in several states that have refused federal funding to expand Medicaid through the Affordable Care Act. The new law includes additional funding for two years for new states that adopt Medicaid expansion for the first time.

Florida Alliance Recording Secretary **Barbara DeVane** [highlighted this aspect of the law](#) during a virtual event with **Rep. Kathy Castor**, Alliance members, and allies from the Lower Drug Prices Now coalition on Monday.

Florida is one of twelve states that have so far refused to take up the federal government's Medicaid funding offer. Last week, Republicans and Democrats in the Wyoming House joined together to pass expansion of the program but that effort was blocked in the state senate.



Rep. Kathy Castor discusses how the American Rescue Act will benefit Florida.

Officials in other states have also raised the possibility of accepting the federal funding to expand Medicaid. Alabama Gov. **Kay Ivey's** office said she is "open to the discussion," and there is fresh movement among some Republicans in states including North Carolina and Texas.

"Seventy-six percent of registered voters in Florida support expanding Medicaid, including 69% of Republicans," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the

Alliance. "All Americans should have access to high quality, affordable health insurance, and it is time for these 12 states to make this available to their residents."

Biden Administration Announces 500,000 New HealthCare.gov Sign-Ups

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) officials announced on Wednesday that, between mid-February and the end of March, [more than 500,000 Americans had signed up for coverage](#) on HealthCare.gov, the federal at the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace for people buying insurance on their own.

That time frame corresponds with the first six weeks of a special enrollment period that the Biden administration created to expand access to health coverage. Normally, enrollment at HealthCare.gov is limited to the last few weeks of the calendar year, but in 2021 the general enrollment period will extend until August 15.

"Having HHS promote a smooth enrollment in the ACA makes an enormous difference in people's lives," said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. "Having an Administration that wants to expand health coverage is critical."

KHN: 'I Can Breathe Again': Older Adults Begin to Test Freedom After Covid Vaccinations

By Judith Graham, *Kaiser Health News*

With a mix of relief and caution, older adults fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are moving out into the world and resuming activities put on hold during the pandemic.

Many are making plans to see adult children and hug grandchildren they haven't visited for months — or longer. Others are getting together with friends indoors, for the first time in a long time.

People are scheduling medical appointments that had been delayed and putting trips to destinations near and far on calendars. Simple things that felt unsafe pre-vaccination now feel possible: petting a neighbor's dog, going for a walk in the park, stopping at a local hangout for a cup of coffee.

"I feel I can breathe again," said **Barry Dym**, 78, of Lexington, Massachusetts, expressing a widely shared sense of freedom.

The rapid rollout of covid vaccines to people 65 and older makes this possible. As of Monday, nearly 49% of seniors in the U.S. had been fully vaccinated, while nearly 73% had received one dose of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. (A third vaccine, from Johnson & Johnson, became available earlier this month and requires just one dose.)

[Recent guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes the protection that vaccines offer. According to the CDC, people who are fully vaccinated can meet indoors without masks, without incurring significant risk. Also, they can visit relatively safely with people who haven't been vaccinated, so long as those individuals are healthy and gatherings remain small.

Still, with coronavirus variants circulating and 55,000 new infections reported daily, the CDC continues to recommend precautions elsewhere, such as wearing masks, staying physically distant in public and refraining from air travel.

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Alliance Members Meet with Members of Congress during Congressional Recess



Alliance Executive Board member and Community Advocacy Network (CAN) representative **Jean Dobashi** and Brigadier General (ret.) **Myron Dobashi** (left) met with **Rep. Kaiali'i Kahele** (HI - center) on the island of Kauai outside the KONG radio station Monday.