



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

“THE PRESIDENT’S FISCAL YEAR 2023 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BUDGET”

APRIL 5, 2022 – 10:00 AM

OVERVIEW

On Tuesday, April 5, the Senate Finance Committee held a hearing to examine the President’s FY 2023 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Members asked about mental health parity; over-the-counter hearing aids; prescription drug pricing reform; drug shortages; solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund; health equity; telehealth; oral healthcare; exhaustion of the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund; mental health; transitioning beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency; comprehensive community behavioral health clinics; No Surprises Act; maternal mortality; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program; Title 42 and care of unaccompanied children; school-based health services; cybersecurity in the healthcare sector; area wage index; rural hospitals; medication assisted treatment; Children’s Hospitals Graduate Medical Education (CHGME); long-term care; and direct and indirect remuneration fees, among other things.

HHS Secretary Becerra touted the Biden Administration’s achievements to increase health insurance enrollment through the Affordable Care Act as well as protect Americans from COVID-19 and save lives. He also urged approval of additional funding to continue efforts to combat the pandemic; passage of the Build Back Better Act to help families access affordable childcare; and increasing the salary of those who work in childcare settings, home and community-based facilities, and as part of the behavioral health workforce. Additionally, Secretary Becerra highlighted the launch of the 988 national suicide lifeline in mid-July; efforts to address disparities and improve health equity; and initiatives to increase access to medication assisted treatment.

OPENING STATEMENTS

- [Chairman Ron Wyden \(D-OR\)](#)
- [Ranking Member Mike Crapo \(R-ID\)](#)

WITNESS STATEMENTS

- [The Honorable Xavier Becerra](#) – Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services

QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) – What is the Administration’s agenda to go after the private insurers and make it clear that mental health parity is a priority and crack down on ongoing abuses?

Sec. Becerra – This budget will provide states with more money to enforce those parity laws. We’re going to try to support states that are trying to move towards parity laws in ways that are meaningful so families can have true services they can access. We’re going to try to eliminate the 190 day lifetime limit on psychiatric hospital services that are available under Medicare. Last year, under the American Rescue Plan, we put in \$3 billion towards behavioral health services – half went to mental health services and the other half went to substance use disorder services. Today, we know that as a result of COVID, families are really suffering from mental stress.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) – The comment period ended on January 18 on FDA’s proposed rule establishing over-the-counter hearing aids. Can you give us any date for when these regulations might be released?

Sec. Becerra – Those regulations will be out very soon. I can’t give you a precise date.

Sen. Grassley – It took more than eight months for this committee to receive responses to our written questions from the budget hearing we held last June. Could you commit to HHS being more responsive to our written questions?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. We’ve received over 500 letters and we’ve had to do more than 500 briefings in this past year. It takes a while but I commit to responding as quickly as possible and being as transparent as we can be.

Sen. Grassley – Does President Biden have a plan to address solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund?

Sec. Becerra – We’re prepared to work with you on a bipartisan basis. We know there are solutions there and there is bipartisan support. We agree with Sen. Wyden that it is important that we look at the costs, not the benefits, of Medicare as we look to reform the system.

Sen. Grassley – Is the Administration preparing any executive action on drug pricing? If so, could you give us some details?

Sec. Becerra – We intend to use whatever available authority we have to try to lower the costs of prescription drugs. We are also intent to work with you on a bipartisan basis to get something done. Everyone agrees the cost of prescription drugs are way too high and something has to be done in a real, meaningful way.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) – Can you assure us that we can work in partnership and as aggressively as we can to ensure there are no drug shortages in America?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. Part of the issue is supply chain and part of it is the economics that drive manufacturers to not produce as much supply as we need. Either way, we have no excuse not to have the supply of drugs that all Americans need.

Sen. Cardin – What is your strategy to prioritize the President’s commitment for fairness and inclusion in American healthcare?

Sec. Becerra – Equity is critical. We saw how many people fell through the cracks as a result of COVID. One of the things we did is that rather than waiting for people come to us, we went to them. When it comes to vaccines, the disparities that we used to see between white Americans and people of color has disappeared. The disparity that we used to see in people applying for coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is beginning to disappear. We have quadrupled the number of ACA navigators so people can make a good decision. The result was that 14.5 million Americans have health insurance because of the ACA.

Sen. Cardin – Can you commit to working with us to expand access to oral health?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. We could do it, especially in Medicaid, for pennies on the dollar.

Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID) – Do you know what the revised exhaustion date of the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund is?

Sec. Becerra – I know we have the latest report, which says 2026. We are waiting for the staff to give us the report that would let make public the report for the Medicare Trust Fund. We will get it to you as quickly as we can.

Sen. Crapo – Can you explain why the President’s budget submission fails to include a specified package of Medicare savings proposals to address the Trust Fund’s looming insolvency?

Sec. Becerra – In the past, the President has submitted proposals to deal with the future of Medicare. In this particular budget, we have some items that deal with incentives to have physicians participate in value-based payment programs that will help drive costs down. As Sen. Wyden said, as we move forward with reforms that improve and strengthen Medicare, we should be looking to reduce costs, not benefits.

Sen. Crapo – Where does the Administration propose finding the savings from Medicare, Medicaid, and other programs to finance new spending to address the mental health crisis without further straining our deficit along with our state budgets?

Sec. Becerra – Each of us has not only the prioritize the need to deal with mental health the way we should have a long time ago but to make sure we have the resources we need to make it happen. The President has put forth proposals in the past. We would like to work with Congress to make sure we can keep this permanently in place. The President is committed to protecting and strengthening our efforts to have everyone receive mental health or physical health services, in parity, without any discrimination.

Sen. Crapo – Do you expect the COVID-19 public health emergency to end this summer? Can you speak to the Administration’s progress on post-emergency transition planning across programs?

Sec. Becerra – We have committed to making sure we give all providers at least 60 day notice of when we will bring down the public health emergency (PHE) declaration. We are continuing to work on plans for what comes next. The President has submitted a proposal that calls for planning on what comes after the PHE. We look forward to working with you on a bipartisan basis to make that happen. Everyone is seeing good signs of where we are in COVID in terms of Omicron, vaccinations, and therapeutics that are needed by the American public. We hope Congress will continue to provide us with funding to help us all the way through this crisis.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) – Can you talk about how comprehensive community behavioral health clinics improve care? Why is it time to ensure every community has these services?

Sec. Becerra – What the President said is we're not going to treat this as business as usual when it comes to mental health. He not only put forth a number of proposals to do this and has committed \$52 billion over the next 10 years to transform our mental health system into one that provides decent quality care for all Americans that need it. We have a specific priority to immediately address behavioral health issues for children. We're going to do everything we can to work with states to launch the 988 national suicide lifeline. We're going to work with you to see if we can embed in our healthcare system the idea that mental health is no different from physical healthcare services. When we provide people with the opportunity to be cared for in their home or in their community instead of being shipped off to some institution is critical. We're going to bolster the support for those local facilities and supports and we're going to do everything we can in this budget to increase the salaries of those who work in those community and home settings.

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) - The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas recently ruled that the rebuttal presumption of a benchmark rate in the interim dispute resolution (IDR) of the No Surprises Act was invalid. Would you commit to accepting the will of Congress and the courts and finalize a rule promptly that does not include a rebuttable presumption of the benchmark in the IDR but rather follows Congressional intent? When can we expect that rule?

Sec. Becerra – CMS has put in place guidance that has made clear that we are updating our documents and other materials in light of the Texas decision to make sure we stay compliant with the law. We will continue to proceed forward. We are continuing to implement other aspects of the No Surprises Act that were not implicated by the court's decision.

Sen. Cassidy – Will you be appealing or accepting that decision?

Sec. Becerra – That's a decision that will be made working with the Department of Justice. I can't give you that answer right now. We're continuing to work through that litigation the best we can.

Sen. Cassidy – What is CMS doing in order to better standardize maternal mortality data that is collected and how it is reported to make us better capable of viewing one state versus another?

Sec. Becerra – We saw with COVID how important it was to have accurate data. Medicare is no different. We have to ensure states are giving us the data we need so both the federal government and states can make important decisions. As you know, moving these databases into a different shell is difficult. It's easy to ask but it's hard to get responses unless you have more than a carrot to ask. We learned during COVID that some states are really good about reporting data, even data they're not required to report, while other states have not. It makes it difficult to make those full decisions.

Sen. Cassidy – It sounds like this committee needs to give you some tools to address that.

Sec. Becerra – We would love to work with you on that.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) – Can you talk through the investments in this budget to address the mental health crisis? How will they help folks who need additional services beyond 988?

Sec. Becerra – The current system is a patchwork. We have different phone numbers people can call when they're facing a crisis or contemplating suicide. 988 is our way to bring it all together. It's a one-stop shop. We're going to have call backup centers so if a particular state is getting a lot of calls, there will be a backup center to take that call so folks aren't put on hold to get services. We're going to increase our investment in community and behavioral health services. We're investing more than \$200 million to make sure we're providing mental health services at local health centers that we can direct people to. Ultimately, we need to glue together all the folks that are doing this work throughout the country and 988 will work really well to do this. We're committed to making mental health parity the law of the land.

Sen. Cortez Masto – Can you explain more about the provisions in this budget that would expand coverage of community health workers?

Sec. Becerra – We're going to be investing more than \$200 million in community behavioral health clinics. We're also proposing that we help states be able to provide better compensation that go into the behavioral health workforce, which is often the most underpaid but indispensable areas of healthcare services. We're going to continue to work with those local programs that exist to offer them new innovations. For example, we're going in a completely new direction with how we treat substance use disorder. We want to go where people are. We not only want to save lives but keep people healthy so we're talking a lot more about harm reduction.

Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) – The last authorization of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program did not include a funding increase. Will you commit to work with me and our MIECHV champions to make critical investments in this program so families can continue to get the services they need?

Sec. Becerra – You have my commitment.

Sen. Menendez – How is HHS preparing for the likely increase in unaccompanied children that will arrive at our southern border this summer?

Sec. Becerra – We are in the process of projecting what our needs will be. We have stood up as many of the licensed facilities that care for these children as we can. We have worked with that universe of licensed care providers to make sure we can offer these children the best care that we can afford to provide them during their temporary stay with us. At the same time, we do prepare, in the event that we have to stand up additional facilities, those that can provide the emergency care necessary so that the Department of Homeland Security has a place to transfer those children over to where they can stay temporarily.

Sen. Menendez – Is the Department still committed to closing emergency intake sites and placing unaccompanied children with long-term shelters in your licensed care provider network?

Sec. Becerra – That is the goal because it's required by a court decision. We make every effort to use every spot and bed that's available under a licensed care facility. Many of those licensed care facilities disappeared because the system was dismantled by the previous administration. We have worked hard to build it up to increase the number of licensed care facilities but when there aren't enough, we still have the obligation to care for these unaccompanied children. That is when we stand up those emergency facilities.

Sen. Menendez – We have a commitment by the President to give refuge to 100,000 Ukrainians. Is HHS making preparations for that?

Sec. Becerra – We are. Just as we provided that refuge for the 68,000 Afghani refugees who have come through, we will be prepared to do the same for those who come from Ukraine.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) – How will the President’s budget request continue to bolster the health insurance marketplace to ensure every American has the opportunity to seek out health coverage that works for them?

Sec. Becerra – We’re going to continue to try to break records when it comes to the ACA. The President has proposed continued work to have navigators out there. Last year, the President extended a special enrollment. We got over three million Americans to sign up that hadn’t signed up before. We’re going to continue to do the work we can to expand mental health and behavioral health services and take this to another level. The President’s budget makes historic investments in areas that for far too long been neglected, including in Indian Health Services.

Sen. Carper – How can Congress better partner with the Administration to better provide resources and support to schools on school-based physical and behavioral health services?

Sec. Becerra – The President has asked us to work and coordinate so we’re not doing things in separate silos. The Department of Education and HHS are working together to make sure children have access to the best services possible, often in schools.

Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) – How can HHS work with all providers, hospitals, device manufacturers, and others in the healthcare sector on cybersecurity? How do you coordinate with CISA and other various components that are grappling with cybersecurity?

Sec. Becerra – At HHS, one of the things we’re trying to do is move everyone towards risk-based decision making to take into account what might happen rather than waiting until something happens. We’re asking people to take a look at what has already been done and best practices that we can learn from. Congress can help with this to make sure the Administration can provide incentives in the private sector to get them to think more about the risk-based decision making model.

Sen. Warner – I have bipartisan legislation that would increase Medicare reimbursement rates for 850 rural hospitals to bring the area wage index to bring it closer to suburban rates. Is this an area where CMS could do it on its own or do we need a legislative bipartisan fix?

Sec. Becerra – Our authorities are pretty expansive but someone is always going to take the time to challenge us in court. We are making specific investments into rural communities on healthcare but what you’re speaking to would help us do this across the board.

Sen. John Barasso (R-WY) – Can you provide detailed and specific information to Congress on emergency flexibilities you used on Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP as a result of the pandemic?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. We are committed to working with you because a lot of those authorities will vanish and we need to work together to deploy what we know has worked.

Sen. Barasso – Will you provide detailed information on emergency waivers that your Department believes Congress should extend or make permanent beyond the PHE?

Sec. Becerra – We look forward to working with you on that as well.

Sen. Barasso – Has your Department specified plans to ensure providers and patients are aware of some of the changes to Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP when the PHE ends?

Sec. Becerra – We have but you could help us a great deal by letting your state leaders know that we are trying to communicate everything that is around the bend. Whether it's the Medicaid wind down or what happens to authorities that we have for telehealth.

Sen. Barasso – I'm concerned that the HHS budget doesn't contain a comprehensive strategy for halting rural hospital closures and building a sustainable rural healthcare delivery system. Can you discuss how the Department is going to address this critical issue?

Sec. Becerra – There is not only an investment made in this budget but there is a plan in place. We included \$374 million in the budget that would be used specifically to improve access, improve quality, and coordinate care in our nation's rural communities. We are investing more money in trying to train healthcare practitioners in rural settings. There are a number of other investments that we're making as well but with the Provider Relief Fund, we've been able to shore up some of our community health clinics and hospitals in these rural settings.

Sen. John Thune (R-SD) – Why hasn't HHS decided to rescind the mask mandate for Head Start?

Sec. Becerra – Most of those kids in Head Start haven't had a chance to get vaccinated. There are still families that are afraid of what could happen to their loved ones. Those who say children don't get COVID should talk to the hundreds of families across America who have lost a child under the age of five as a result of COVID. We are driven by the science on the work we do on COVID and we will continue to do everything we can to protect every human life in America, including our children.

Sen. Thune – When do you foresee that rule being rescinded?

Sec. Becerra – The masking requirements and guidance are driven by the science. Once we see that the need for those types of protections are no longer there, we will move forward to make those adjustments.

Sen. Thune – What do you see the Department doing administratively on Medicare telehealth after the end of the PHE?

Sec. Becerra – We would like to work with you to extend coverage for patients to use their home as the originating site for that healthcare service. We would like to continue to offer FQHCs and rural health clinics the ability to provide services from distant sites; move to payment parity for behavioral health telehealth services; and offer audio only telehealth for patients.

Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) – Would you commit to working with Congress to ensure we don't have interruption in medication assisted treatment, particularly really important treatment like Suboxone via telehealth when the PHE ends?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. We'll try to make sure you can get whatever technical assistance you need. As you know, one of the things that makes it more difficult is it's not just up to HHS. We have to work with our drug enforcement partners. We look forward to your support in trying to get to all the different agencies that have to have a say in this.

Sen. Portman – Why has the CDC decided all of a sudden that pandemic conditions have improved enough to terminate Title 42 when HHS is also asking us for billions of dollars in emergency funding for pandemic relief and the Administration continues to extend the COVID PHE?

Sec. Becerra - Title 42 is authority that we have under law to address healthcare emergency that relates to the need to quarantine. It gives us the ability for us to take measures which otherwise would not be lawful to keep Americans safe. That quarantine authority has been used very rarely and it is for the purposes of something like this pandemic. The authority that I have to declare a PHE throughout the country applies a different law in different ways with different standards. So, that's why you see different treatment of Title 42 and the PHE. Title 42 is not an immigration related law. It's a healthcare related law. When the science and the evidence tells us that we no longer need the use of quarantine authority under Title 42 because of healthcare conditions, then Title 42 must come down. That's why you see the actions being taken by the administration. The PHE takes into account many other things beyond quarantining necessity and authorities, and that's why you see a difference. Using Title 42 for immigration purposes is a misapplication of the law. On his first day in office, the President sent Congress a proposal to fix our broken immigration system. That's where we need to go if we want to deal with the border situation that we have and not by using a healthcare related authority to try to deal with immigration challenges.

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) – The President's budget proposes \$350 million for Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education (CHGME), a slight decrease in funding from the \$375 million we had included in the recently passed Omnibus. Will you work with me and Senator Casey to make sure we go the right direction on CHGME funding?

Sec. Becerra – Absolutely. Those numbers that we put out in the budget were based on the continuing resolution, which was way below what the omnibus is. Don't take those numbers so literally because they were based on what we knew at the time of the budget being prepared and not what ended up happening with the Omnibus.

Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) – Can you highlight how important it is for Congress to extend advance premium tax credits as soon as possible?

Sec. Becerra – As you know, there is a cliff that exists for those in the middle class to be able to afford health insurance coverage for their families. There is nothing like having a good quality health insurance plan to give you peace of mind to know that if ever needed your child can go to the hospital when necessary and you won't go bankrupt as a result. Extending these tax credits are indispensable in continuing the progress of getting more Americans covered. We saw an additional 20 million Americans get health insurance coverage under President Biden's plans and we want to continue that progress. Without the tax credit, many of these middle class families that received affordable insurance coverage under the ACA would not be able to hold it because it's too expensive. And it could be something as simple as getting a small raise in your salary from one month to the next that puts you over the top of what allows you to qualify for a tax credit. That's insane. That's the cliff that people fall over.

Sen. Bennet – Can you talk about why we need to make strategic investments to address the mental and behavioral health crisis for young people in this country?

Sec. Becerra - If you were to talk to families across the nation about mental health, about half of those parents would tell you that they have had to take their child in to get mental health services. We have seen the numbers skyrocket for emergency room visits by young adults and adolescents, especially among girls. It's a crisis and we need to start acting now. That's why the President makes substantial investments in this, including the 988 national suicide hotline number, which will launch in mid-July. We're putting together this network of detached providers that are out there right now in the country. We want to make it into one holistic approach. 988 should become the equivalent of 911 for mental health.

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MO) – Why should Congress give you an increase in Title 10 funds that you've requested when you're abusing these funds to get around my state and other states pro-life laws contrary to the will of residents who don't want to subsidize the abortion industry with their tax dollars?

Sec. Becerra – We will not only follow the law but we will enforce the law.

Sen. Daines – Has your team reviewed the Montana state law? You circumvented the law and pulled \$2 million and reallocated it.

Sec. Becerra – As a federal department, we must abide by federal law. That's what we're doing when it comes to our family planning program money and we will continue to abide by the law. We respect what a state may wish to do in deploying some of its resources but we have an obligation to follow federal law.

Sen. Daines - Given the CDC's role, can you discuss the extent as to what potential impact rescinding Title 42 would have on illegal immigration?

Sec. Becerra – Title 42 is an authority that is granted under statute to deal with health conditions in the country, usually for purposes of quarantine. What CDC had to do in implementing Title 42 is determine whether or not, based on the health conditions in the country, we could take measures which otherwise wouldn't be allowed by law to try to isolate or quarantine individuals. CDC has considered current public health conditions and recent developments within the COVID-19 pandemic and made the decision based on health considerations. When it comes to immigration law and also our border enforcement, those are not necessarily public health related conditions. On his first day in office, President Biden sent to Congress a proposal to reform a very broken immigration system.

Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA)- How will increases in appropriations toward nursing home quality and oversight be beneficial to better protect residents?

Sec. Becerra – COVID has made life more difficult for these facilities and it's tough to find the qualified professionals that you need and be able to pay them properly. And of course, we also have those facilities that don't try to provide quality service and that are cutting corners. That's where we're going to do much more in oversight and surveillance. The budget reflects that with more than a 20% increase in funding to make sure we do that. We're also trying to provide more services and resources so that we can actually help increase the pay of those workers that do indispensable work with our loved ones. We look forward to working with you, whether it means moving more of the services towards community based and home based services, or whether it means making sure that if you're going to go to a nursing home or some facility that may not be so close to home, that you're going to receive quality services for your loved one.

Sen. Casey - Research shows that unaddressed childhood grief and trauma can lead to difficulties like decreased academic performance, mental health issues and early mortality. What can you tell us about the Administration's efforts in this area?

Sec. Becerra – Tens of thousands of children in America have lost their primary or secondary caregivers as a result of COVID. What we're trying to do is make sure that we provide services to families through home or community based services that make it possible for the child to receive at home services with quality. We're also trying to beef up the support we provide to those kids who have to go through the foster care program, because we find a lot of kids are falling through the cracks there. We're going to make an emphasis as well on those kids who are aging out of the foster care system to make sure that there are continued resources even after they have to leave the foster care program and be on their own. This particular budget makes investments in mental health services and substance use services that are focused on getting people back on the right track.

Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) – What is HHS doing to expand access to medication assisted treatment?

Sec. Becerra – We've been working with our partners in the Department of Drug Enforcement and Department of Justice to make sure that we can move forward. We've seen the data, science, and evidence prove that medication assisted treatment works and so we want to make sure that we give providers the flexibility to offer that treatment to a lot of folks who will benefit from it.

Sen. Hassan – How would allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices save money for patients and reduce federal spending?

Sec. Becerra - One in three Americans have reported to us that they don't take the medication they're supposed to because they can't afford to continue to use it up as quickly as they would. We have to do something. We are ready to use whatever authorities we have. We don't believe we have the kind of authorities that won't send us to court to be able to do as good of a job as you all could do to change some of the law to give us more authorities. There is no reason why you can't get the best price for something as important and precious as a medical service or a prescription drug. Give us that opportunity through Medicare and we will lower the price of prescription drug medications for Americans.

Sen. Hassan - How have state antitrust restrictions influenced the budget request for family planning funds?

Sec. Becerra - First and foremost, we must enforce and comply with federal law. Under federal law, family planning services should be available to families who qualify. We're going to make sure that we provide that service, including contraception services, to families throughout the country. We respect what states wish to do in terms of how they implement their particular laws and their enforcement and administration of their services. But we have an obligation to make sure that under our federal laws, no one is discriminated. So, we're going to make family planning services available to everyone who qualifies under federal law.

Sen. Hassan - How will HHS most effectively use the current proposed budget increase to ensure that the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care work collaboratively to serve as many families as possible sooner?

Sec. Becerra – We wish to have those services be as seamless as possible. We want to make sure that a family knows that their child will get the best care and educational services possible. So, we're going to try to be as coordinated as we can to make that as seamless a process as possible.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) - When parents can't find affordable child care, how does that affect parents' ability to work and in turn businesses' ability to hire?

Sec. Becerra - It brings things to a halt and you're stopping productive Americans from getting out there and help businesses be profitable and prosper. It makes it very difficult for our economy to continue to be the leader when you can't get people who are qualified to get out there and work.

Sen. Warren – There is clearly strong demand for childcare. Why isn't supply rising to meet it? Why hasn't the market solved this problem?

Sec. Becerra – If it's left in the private sectors hands, it becomes unaffordable for most families, including middle class families. You're essentially paying college tuition for the care of your two year old child. At the same time, states with the support of the federal government, have been providing subsidies to help childcare providers get out there and offer those services. Here's the difficulty. Some of the workforce is getting paid some of the lowest wages. We need to increase that because those folks are saying 'I can go make more money flipping burgers.' We have to increase the wages that we pay to people who are essentially caring for the next generation of leaders. At the same time, we have to be able to expand the size of the care facilities so that they can take in more kids from these families. The proposal in the Build Back Better Act actually made some of that possible. I hope that we're able to succeed in getting some of that across the line.

Sen. Warren - Do you agree that to fix this problem, federal investments in childcare are essential, not just for tackling higher costs for families with young children, but also for reducing the drivers that are raising costs economy wide?

Sec. Becerra – Without a doubt. It's the same reason we have public education in this country. We realized if we left it in hands of the private sector, very few parents would be able to afford to send their kids to K-12. Same thing applies to childcare. We need to be supportive because there are caregivers who are trying to do the best job they can, but they're overwhelmed.

Sen. Warren – In other words, whether we have children individually or not, we all have an interest in making this economy work and childcare is part of making this economy work. Is that fair?

Sec. Becerra - It takes a village.

Sen. Wyden – Where are we with addressing direct and indirect remuneration fees? I see pharmacists not being able to make these payments, which hurts the consumers, particularly in rural areas.

Sec. Becerra – The best thing I can tell you is to stay in touch with Administrator Brooks-LaSure because we're trying to move as quickly as we can on this. Everywhere I go, I always get tapped on the shoulder by someone asks if we can deal with this because it's not only making it impossible for us as a provider of pharmacy to dispense but it makes it tough for us to help those families who need those prescriptions right away. We want to tackle this. As you know, this is an issue that's been around festering for years. I think CMS is going to try to move as quickly as we can. I suspect we're going to find ourselves in court at some point or another, but we're going to move because it's too important to make sure we dispense these medications that people absolutely need.

Please click [here](#) for the archived hearing.