

Snapshot: How HHS is Building a Healthier America

IN 2022, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) worked to deliver on the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to build a healthier America. Key areas of focus included tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing health care costs, expanding access to care, strengthening behavioral health care, and reducing health disparities. In 2023, HHS will continue to play a major role in the Administration's efforts to expand access to affordable health care to millions more people by implementing the Inflation Reduction Act. Our commitment to advancing health equity and to ensuring that no one gets left behind is central to all our work. The following is a snapshot of key HHS accomplishments from the past year that support the health and well-being of everyone living in America:

Key Areas

- ✔ Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic
- ✔ Reducing Health Care Costs and Expanding Access to Coverage and Care
- ✔ Strengthening Mental and Behavioral Health Care
- ✔ Improving Nutrition and Encouraging Healthy Choices
- ✔ Tackling Climate Change as a Public Health Issue
- ✔ Investing in the Public Health Workforce and Supporting Care Givers
- ✔ Strengthening Supports for Vulnerable Children and Families
- ✔ Investing in Health Innovation
- ✔ Strengthening Public Health Preparedness and Response
- ✔ Advancing Equity and Increasing Opportunity for Communities

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic

Guidance

- ✔ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [updated and streamlined existing COVID-19 community guidance](#) to help people better understand their risk, how to protect themselves and others, what actions to take if exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, and what actions to take if they have symptoms or test positive for the virus.



- ✔ The HHS [‘We Can Do This’](#) COVID-19 Vaccine Public Education Campaign worked with national and local organizations, state and local health departments, K-12 school districts and higher education institutions, and pharmacies to host pop-up vaccination clinics in urban and rural communities across the country. Since the beginning of the Biden-Harris Administration, the campaign has:
 - Organized more than 100 pop-up vaccination clinics in nearly 50 cities.
 - Produced more than 60 ads for targeted markets to increase vaccine confidence and uptake, and more than 30 ads raising awareness of COVID-19 treatment options.
 - Partnered with over 1,000 organizations, the majority of which work with minority or rural communities. These partnerships have reached over 26 million people and resulted in hundreds of events, and tens of thousands of vaccinations.
 - Launched the COVID-19 Community Corps — a network of nearly 20,000 community leaders and volunteers who serve as trusted voices.
 - Helped close a 10-point disparity gap in our nation’s vaccination rate last year between White and Black/Latino communities.
- ✔ As part of the Administration’s end of year efforts to encourage more Americans to get their updated vaccine in preparation for winter and holiday gatherings, with a special focus on older adults, HHS coordinated outreach in communities with trusted community partners and messengers to provide easy access to updated COVID-19 vaccines and information on the benefits of vaccination.
- ✔ The Administration for Community Living (ACL) funded grants totaling \$125 million to [help older adults and people with disabilities get the updated vaccine](#). With this funding, senior centers, centers for independent living and other organizations that serve disabled people and older adults host vaccination clinics, providing accessible transportation to vaccination sites, connecting people to in-home options, and more.
- ✔ CDC created the [Prevention Research Centers Vaccine Confidence Network](#), focused on increasing vaccine confidence and uptake, especially in communities experiencing health disparities.

Research and Development

- ✔ The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) coordinated 14 federal departments and agencies to begin a whole-of-government response to Long COVID, including publishing [three reports on Long COVID](#).
- ✔ OASH and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) supported the [PandemicX Accelerator](#), a 6-month pilot project that brought together 15 digital health startups to build and scale COVID-19 technologies with businesses fueled by HHS data and healthcare innovation.
- ✔ ACL’s National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) funded several projects focused increasing support for people with long COVID, such as one of the first published studies focused on [return-to-work needs](#).



- Allowing Medicare to negotiate better prices on certain drugs.
- Offering improved financial protections for out-of-pocket drug costs by capping annual out-of-pocket drug costs at \$2,000 for 2025 and eliminating catastrophic cost sharing for prescription drugs for Americans with Medicare Part D starting in 2024.
- ✔ The No Surprises Act went into effect on January 1, 2022, ensuring protections from surprise bills for most Americans with private insurance. HHS and the Departments of Labor and Treasury [published extensive guidance](#) throughout the year for plans and issuers, providers, and consumers aimed at ensuring compliance with the No Surprises Act.
- ✔ HHS initiated Qualified Payment Amount (QPA) audits of issuers offering individual and/or group health insurance coverage in states where HHS and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has jurisdiction over QPA provisions.
- ✔ AHRQ convened a Health Equity Summit to identify strategies needed to advance equity within healthcare delivery.
- ✔ AHRQ released a grant supplement NOFO to increase the diversity of the health services researchers, including groups that have been shown to be underrepresented in health services research and who are or become disabled.
- ✔ Leaders from AHRQ and the National Institute of Drug Abuse published a commentary in the New England Journal of Medicine that discusses how applying an equity lens to addressing the worsening epidemic of substance use disorders is critical to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities.
- ✔ AHRQ published the Congressionally mandated [2022 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report](#), which indicates that despite significant improvements in the quality of care for minority and underserved communities, disparities persist.
- ✔ FDA issued a final rule to improve access to hearing aids that may lower costs for millions of Americans with perceived mild to moderate hearing loss.

Improving treatments and care

- ✔ FDA introduced an innovative proposal to broaden the types of drugs that can be approved as nonprescription—increasing availability of drugs that would otherwise only be available by prescription.
- ✔ CDC released updated and expanded recommendations for clinicians providing pain care for adult outpatients with short- and long-term pain.
- ✔ HRSA's administration of the community health center program allowed more than 30 million people in underserved communities across the country to receive primary health care services—including blood pressure testing, diabetes and asthma control, cancer screening, and wellness checks— regardless of their ability to pay.
- ✔ HRSA's maternal and child health programs helped almost 3.7 million infants— nearly every newborn in the country— receive newborn screening for genetic and metabolic conditions like cystic fibrosis, thyroid diseases, sickle cell, and immunodeficiency conditions.



Ensuring access to reproductive health care

- ✔ OASH supported reproductive rights by launching reproductiverights.gov, starting a campaign to help connect women to resources they need, and strengthening our work in Title X.
- ✔ OASH bolstered Title X to help expand and restore access to equitable and affordable family planning services nationwide, including expanding telehealth care in Title X clinics, increasing provider training, and awarding \$280 million to Title X clinics.
- ✔ HHS launched the Task Force on Reproductive Healthcare Access, an intra-departmental group that coordinates the work of HHS and advises the Secretary on protecting and bolstering sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice domestically and abroad.
- ✔ HHS issued guidance and a letter from Secretary Becerra to reaffirm that the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA) protects providers when offering abortion services as stabilizing care for emergency medical conditions.
- ✔ The Office of Population Affairs (OPA) led a public awareness campaign to increase awareness among women of reproductive age where to access reproductive health services and rights associated with accessing these services.
- ✔ Following the Dobbs decision, OCR issued guidance to help protect patients seeking reproductive health care, as well as their providers, and to address how federal law and regulations protect individuals' private medical information.
- ✔ HHS, along with the U.S. Departments of the Treasury and Labor, issued guidance to clarify protections for birth control coverage under the ACA. Under the ACA, most private health plans are required to provide birth control and family planning counseling at no additional cost.
- ✔ OCR issued guidance on gender-affirming care clarifying that the HIPAA Privacy Rule prohibits disclosure of gender affirming care which is protected health information, without signed authorization, except in limited circumstances. The guidance also clarified that denials of health care based on gender identity are illegal, as is restricting doctors and health care providers from providing care because of a patient's gender identity.
- ✔ HHS issued a proposed rule that would strengthen the regulations interpreting the nondiscrimination provision of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and would reinforce that discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or related conditions.
- ✔ HHS issued guidance to roughly 60,000 U.S. retail pharmacies, clarifying their obligations under federal civil rights laws.
- ✔ HHS released a report for the President on HHS actions to ensure access to reproductive health care following the Supreme Court's ruling, with further details on future actions and commitments.



- ✔ Launched the Secretary's Challenge on Equity to solicit innovative policy ideas to advance equity in our programs, policies, and processes using existing authorities.
- ✔ Provided practical guidance to staff to ensure that all populations have opportunity with HHS programs and policies. This included integrating equity assessments and disparities impact statements into HHS work consistent with Executive Order 13985.
- ✔ Relunched the HHS Language Access Steering Committee to create an enduring structure to facilitate sharing of effective practices and procedures for language access.
- ✔ Proposed comprehensive updates to the nondiscrimination provision of the Affordable Care Act to clarify duties of covered entities and lower barriers to language access. Importantly, the statutes and regulation apply to more than just ACA-related programs and services.
- ✔ Established the Small Business Customer Experience as a department-wide tool to forecast opportunities for small businesses and reduce barriers to entry for small businesses and increase competition. Use of the tool generated over 6,500 procurement opportunities for FY23, which is double from the previous year.

Investing in social determinants of health

- ✔ ACF released \$338 million in funding to help states and territories tailor social service programming for their population's needs.
- ✔ ACF provided \$4.5 billion in heating and cooling assistance to states, territories, and tribes. In addition to subsidizing home heating costs and covering unpaid utility bills, the federal program will help families make cost-effective home energy repairs to lower their heating and cooling bills.
- ✔ ACF released \$183.2 million in funding to support community-based services to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and help families and individuals with low incomes become fully self-sufficient.
- ✔ ACL, in partnership with CDC, launched a Community Care Hub National Learning Community to improve the capability and capacity of networks of community-based organizations to contract with health care organizations to address health-related social needs and public health needs.
- ✔ ACL announced winners of the Social Care Referrals Challenge, which sought IT solutions to support health care systems and community-based organizations (CBOs) in partnering to provide holistic health and social care for older adults and disabled people.
- ✔ CDC funded 36 communities to develop action plans to address social determinants of health by working across healthcare, housing, transportation, social services, and other community-based organizations. The goal is to prevent and reduce chronic diseases among people experiencing health disparities.

- ✔ CDC [funded training and deployment of community health workers](#) in 68 communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and that also experienced long-standing health disparities. They are working on social determinants of health with over 14,000 referrals to date, for things like transportation, food and nutrition services, housing and shelter services, and access to health care.
- ✔ The Office of Minority Health (OMH) and CDC launched a new Hear Her campaign segment aimed at improving maternal health outcomes among American Indian and Alaska Native women.