

Coffee CAHC is a weekly newsletter where we round up and comment on the latest health coverage policy developments both nationally and here in Maine. We hope you find these updates helpful!

Please email [policy@mainecahc.org](mailto:policy@mainecahc.org) with questions.



**Coffee CAHC**  
118<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session  
131<sup>st</sup> Maine Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

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Good afternoon, Coffee CAHC readers!

This week, we are listening to Robert Cray and Chuck Berry performing [Brown-Eyed Handsome Man](#) in *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll!*

### **Evans Receives AMA Award for Outstanding Government Service**

Richard A. Evans, M.D., a board member at CAHC and former Maine State Representative was recognized for his bipartisan approach to legislating in Maine which ultimately led to the passage and enactment of six bills sponsored by Evans including legislation to establish the [Accidental Drug Overdose Death Review Panel](#), and a bill maximizing health care coverage for uninsured people through easy enrollment in the MaineCare program or a marketplace plan.



A surgeon and decorated veteran, [Evans' 2020 election](#) made him just the fifth Black lawmaker in the 200-year history of one of the nation's whitest states. [AMA Board Chair Willie Underwood](#), in presenting Evans with the award, described him as "A veteran, a leader, a legislator, a physician and a champion for people in need, he has demonstrated time and time again what it means to live your values: honor, integrity, compassion, and bridge building."

Congratulations, Dr. Evans! CAHC is honored to have your guidance on the board.

### **National Level**

**Prescription Drug Costs Scrutinized.** On February 8, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, chaired by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), held a [hearing](#) on why the United States pays the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. The Committee heard from the CEOs of Johnson & Johnson, Merck, and Bristol Myers Squibb and disinterested researchers from Public Citizen, the Initiative for Medicines, Access & Knowledge, and the USC Schaeffer Center. Sanders opened the meeting by observing that while Americans are divided on many issues, they are united on "the need to substantially lower the outrageous price of prescription drugs in this country."

The CEOs pointed fingers at Pharmacy Benefit Managers and the high cost of research and development. Sanders wasn't having it. He noted that Bristol Myers Squibb spent \$3.2 billion more on stock buybacks and dividends in 2022 than on research and

development. Since 2012, Johnson & Johnson has spent \$46 billion more on stock buybacks and dividends. He also noted that CEO compensation packages contribute to the high cost of prescription drugs. [CNN detailed the back and forth](#) at the hearing.

According to Kaiser Family Foundation, prescription drug costs are [a top concern for the American public](#). Eighty-two percent of Americans surveyed say drug prices are unreasonable; 73% say more regulation is needed.

## State Level

**Legislative Committee to hold Work Session on bill to Strengthen Hospital Financial Assistance Programs. LD 1955**, which would increase eligibility for Maine's Free Care program from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), increase access to applications along with removing unnecessary application barriers, and prohibits billing or collections until a hospital fully determines a patient's eligibility for free care. The work session in the Health and Human Services Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, February 21<sup>st</sup> at 1:30 pm. You can livestream the work session from the Committee's website, [here](#).

A 2022 [survey](#) sponsored by CAHC found that more than four out of ten Mainers have medical debt in their household. However, roughly half of Mainers who have hospital-related medical debt are not aware that hospitals in Maine are required to provide medically necessary care for free to Mainers who meet certain income guidelines. And only one out of ten Maine families with hospital-based medical debt receive financial assistance through a hospital. Twice as many have been denied financial assistance through a hospital. LD 1955 not only increases eligibility for hospital free care programs, but it also strengthens notice requirements to ensure people are aware of these programs. The bill also requires hospitals to offer affordable payment plans to people who don't qualify for free care.

The public hearing on LD 1955 included testimony in support of the bill from community health workers at [Maine Access Immigrant Network](#) and [New Mainer's Public Health Initiative](#). Maine Equal Justice, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Healthcare Purchaser Alliance, AARP Maine, and the Maine Immigrants Right Coalition also [testified](#) in support of LD 1955. Additionally, see a letter to the editor from a Maine physician supporting LD 1955 [here](#).

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**Governor Mills' Supplemental Budget.** Governor Mill's \$71 million [supplemental budget](#) focuses heavily on gun safety proposals following the October 25<sup>th</sup> mass shooting in Lewiston that left 18 Mainers dead. The budget also includes mental health initiatives, housing priorities, and a focus on climate resilience following a series of massive storms that damaged many Mainers' property in both 2023 and the new year.

On the health care end of things, the supplemental budget focuses on attracting and retaining health care workers in the state, dedicating \$34 million to a MaineCare cost-of-living adjustment for behavioral health providers and an overhaul of nursing facility rates which is expected to improve quality, access to care, and the ability to attract and retain high-quality health providers throughout the state. The governor also prioritized improving hospital reimbursements, allotting \$96.4 million in Federal, State, and hospital revenue, with the support from the Maine Hospital Association, to reform hospital reimbursement rates and therefore improve the health of Maine people.

Although the governor put forth important health care related spending initiatives, the proposed budget also rolls back [recent expansions](#) to the Medicare Savings Program (MSP), which helps older Mainers and people with disabilities afford Medicare costs, like

premiums and copays. We hope the final supplemental budget will restore the funding needed to implement changes to the MSP that were enacted by the Legislature last year, especially given the people most impacted by these changes are people who have experienced economic disparities and injustices throughout their lives, resulting in having less income later in life. In Maine, the majority of those who would have qualified are lower-income older women, older BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people and older people with disabilities.

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### Want to Know More?

A [specialized type of immune cell](#) holds the memory of proteins that cause allergies. [Reprogramming T cells](#) may fight aging. And, [inducing the heart to self-repair](#) may hold the key to new treatments for heart disease.

Until next time,

The staff at CAHC



Advocating the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine.

**Consumers for  
Affordable  
Health Care**



Consumer Assistance HelpLine

**1-800-965-7476**

[www.maineahc.org](http://www.maineahc.org)

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