



## Coffee CAHC

118<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

131<sup>st</sup> Maine Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

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.

Good afternoon, Coffee CAHC readers,

Our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones, who are injured, and all of us as we process the tragic event in Lewiston. We are grateful to those working to help the many people affected, knowing they are going above and beyond. That is what Mainers do – while at a loss for the right words, we hold space for our communities, and remain hopeful for eventual healing.

### National Level

**Biden Administration's Bridge Access Program.** Free updated COVID-19 vaccines are available for most adults living in the U.S. through their commercial or private health insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid plans. However, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has announced the [Bridge Access Program For COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments Program](#) to maintain broad access to COVID-19 vaccines for millions of *uninsured* Americans. The program, launched in mid-September, provides continued, free coverage of COVID-19 vaccines for the estimated 25-30 million adults who likely would have otherwise lost access.

You can get free COVID-19 vaccines at healthcare providers, federally supported health centers, and pharmacies participating in the Bridge Access Program. Visit [vaccines.gov](https://vaccines.gov) to find providers that offer free COVID-19 vaccines through the Bridge Access Program.

The federal government has resumed providing free at-home COVID-19 tests. The tests should be good through the end of the year. Order free at-home tests at <https://www.covid.gov/tests>.

The US Food and Drug Administration has extended expiration dates on many COVID tests. Visit the FDA's [website](#) for more information on extended expiration dates.

**Biden Appoints Monica Bertagnolli to Lead the National Institutes of Health.** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the nation's medical research agency. The agency has a budget of more than \$47 billion and is the largest funder of medical research in the world. However, the responsibility of its director has become more complex since the pandemic. It is "an enormous job of bridging between the world of policy, the world of the public, and the world of science," [said](#) Larry Levitt of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

This much was clear in Bertagnolli's confirmation hearing. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP), agreed to hold the hearing only after the Biden administration [announced a contract](#) with [biotech company Regeneron Pharmaceuticals](#) for an antibody to prevent COVID-19. The contract required the list price of any resulting drug to be equal to or lower than the price in other major countries. Much of the hearing

reflected the ongoing national conversations surrounding high prices of prescription drugs. Senator Sander's opening remarks detailed what he described as the failures of the country's "broken" health system. "Very relevant to the hearing that we are conducting right now," he [said](#), "we spend, as a nation, the highest prices — we pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, in some cases 10 times more than the people in other nations."

The Senate HELP committee [voted](#) to send Bertagnolli's nomination to the chamber's floor, moving her one step closer to taking the role of NIH director. The Committee advanced her nomination on a 15-6 vote, with many Republicans voting in support and only Chairman Bernie Sanders breaking with the Democratic caucus to vote against her.

## State Level

**Maine's Office of Affordable Health Care Convenes First Annual Affordability Hearing.** The newly established Office of Affordable Health Care held its first annual public hearing at the end of September, highlighting the barriers many Mainers face accessing affordable health care.

The Office is charged with analyzing health care cost growth and spending trends, monitoring adoption of alternative payment models, and developing proposals for how to improve the cost-efficient provision of high-quality care, improve coordination, efficiency, and quality of the health care system, and improve health care affordability and coverage for individuals and small businesses in Maine.

The public hearing provided a platform for individuals, health care providers and health care advocacy organizations to express affordability concerns, share their personal experiences with affordability barriers, and offer potential policy solutions. In her testimony, Kate Ende, policy director at Consumers for Affordable Health Care highlighted gaps in immigrant eligibility for MaineCare coverage, rising prescription drug and hospital costs, and unaffordable private insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs as barriers Mainers experience when trying to access and pay for the health care they need.

Cristina Tusimbana and Simane Ibrahim, Community Health Workers at Maine Access Immigrant Network, both highlighted the importance of hospital free care and outlined the barriers facing immigrant communities in accessing the care for which they are eligible. Other testifiers, including Cristina and Simane, emphasized the need to remove discriminatory MaineCare eligibility exclusions that bar many immigrants from accessing the health coverage they need.

A recording of the hearing on September 27<sup>th</sup> can be watched [here](#).

**Open Enrollment for 2024 Health Plans Begins Nov. 1.** The annual open enrollment period for 2024 individual health insurance will begin next Wednesday, November 1, 2023. Open enrollment will end on January 15, 2024. People who enroll in a plan by December 15, will have coverage begin on January 1, 2024. People who sign up during open enrollment after December 15 will have their coverage begin on February 1, 2024.

Mainers looking for 2024 health coverage can apply for and enroll in a plan at [CoverME.gov](#), Maine's State-based Marketplace. Certified Maine Enrollment Assistants are also available throughout the state to provide free one-on-one enrollment help. You can find an enrollment assister near you [here](#), or call our free confidential HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476.

Last year, [more than 8 out of 10](#) Mainers who enrolled in Marketplace plans during open enrollment qualified for financial assistance to lower their monthly premiums.

Mainers shopping for 2024 coverage on [CoverME.gov](https://CoverME.gov) can choose from health plans offered by Anthem, Community Health Options, Harvard Pilgrim, and, in certain counties, Taro Health. You can get premium estimates and view your 2024 plan options using CoverME.gov's [Plan Comparison Tool](#) or call our HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476.

And don't forget, you can apply MaineCare any time of year- learn more at [CoverME.gov](https://CoverME.gov) or call our HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476 with questions about your coverage options or if you need help applying for or enrolling in coverage.

### Want to Know More?

Llama herding [can revitalize](#) land. Female chimpanzees (a species with which humans share 98.8% of DNA) [experience menopause](#). And roosters [may recognize themselves](#) in a mirror.

Until next time,

The staff at CAHC



**Consumers for Affordable Health Care** is a Maine based, not for profit, private organization that works to advocate the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. We do this through our toll-free Consumer Assistance HelpLine, educational publications and trainings as well as bringing the voice of the Maine people to the legislature when health care or coverage issues arise.

Please consider making a donation to support this important work.

