ANOHC Federal Policy Update

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Federal Policy News

KFF Poll Analysis: Healthcare Affordability Played Key Role in 2026 Midterm Elections

A new KFF analysis of the 2026 midterm elections finds that healthcare affordability was a major concern for voters, with approximately six in ten reporting they were "very concerned" about healthcare costs, an increase of five percentage points from the 2024 presidential election.

Key Findings:

- **Healthcare costs influenced voter preferences.** In key Senate battleground states, approximately two-thirds of voters who were very concerned about healthcare costs supported Democratic candidates, compared to roughly three in ten who supported Republicans.
- **Democrats held an advantage on healthcare issues.** Half of midterm voters (50%) said Democrats were better equipped to handle healthcare, compared to 30% who favored Republicans.
- **Voters expressed dissatisfaction with federal healthcare policies.** Majorities said the Trump Administration's policies had worsened their personal healthcare costs (55%) and Americans' ability to access care (56%).
- **Support for a larger federal role in healthcare remained strong.** Approximately six in ten voters favored greater federal involvement in helping Americans access healthcare, including majorities in Michigan and Maine, where Medicare for All featured prominently in Senate campaigns.

Why This Matters. The election results show that healthcare affordability and access remain important concerns for voters as the 120th Congress prepares to take office. For dental public health, these issues are closely tied to ongoing debates over Medicaid funding, Medicare dental coverage, and insurance reforms. As lawmakers set their priorities for 2027, there may be opportunities to bring greater attention to oral health access and affordability within broader healthcare discussions. (KFF)

CMS Announces Six-Month Delay in Medicaid Work Requirement Enforcement

On November 13, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that states may opt for a six-month delay in enforcing new Medicaid work requirements, originally scheduled to take effect January 1, 2027. Under the optional "hold harmless" period, states would have until June 30, 2027, before disenrolling beneficiaries for failing to demonstrate compliance with the requirements.

The decision follows concerns from state Medicaid agencies about the administrative and technological challenges of implementing the new rules, which generally require certain adults ages 19-64 to document at least 80 hours per month of work, education, or community engagement activities. (Axios)

House Democrats Outline Healthcare Priorities Following House Majority Win

Following their victory in the 2026 midterm elections, Democrats are preparing to take control of the U.S. House when the 120th Congress convenes on January 3, 2027. House Democratic leaders plan to move quickly on an agenda focused on healthcare affordability, lowering household costs, ending the war in Iran, and reversing certain Trump Administration tariffs. (AP News)

Key Healthcare Priorities:

- **Medicaid funding:** Democrats plan to introduce legislation reversing Medicaid spending reductions enacted under the Republican tax and spending law, which are projected to exceed $900 billion over the next decade.
- **ACA subsidies:** Restoring enhanced Affordable Care Act premium tax credits is another priority, following unsuccessful efforts to extend the subsidies in the Senate.
- **Broader affordability:** House Democrats also intend to pursue proposals addressing rising housing, energy, grocery, and caregiving costs.

What to Watch. The incoming House majority signals renewed congressional attention to Medicaid funding and healthcare coverage in 2027. However, divided control of the federal government and procedural barriers in the Senate may complicate efforts to enact significant changes.

Sen. Bernie Sanders Renews Medicare for All Push Ahead of New Congress

Following Democrats' midterm election victories, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) is calling on lawmakers to advance Medicare for All and expand federal healthcare coverage in 2027. Sanders, who is expected to chair the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, outlined several proposals aimed at expanding access to healthcare without immediately eliminating employer-sponsored insurance. (Politico)

Key Proposals:

- Lower the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 55.
- **Expand Medicare benefits to include dental, vision, and hearing services.**
- Guarantee universal healthcare coverage for children from birth through age 19.
- Reverse Medicaid spending reductions enacted under the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Sanders is urging Democrats to pursue these reforms through budget reconciliation, which would allow eligible legislation to advance with a simple Senate majority. However, significant obstacles remain, including potential opposition from moderate Democrats and a likely presidential veto.

What to Watch. Sanders' renewed push signals that Medicare expansion, including dental benefits, could become a more prominent part of the congressional healthcare agenda in 2027. While Democrats have gained

control of Congress, differences within the party over the scope and timing of healthcare reforms could complicate legislative action. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), who is expected to chair the Senate Finance Committee, has expressed support for Medicare for All but has not committed to advancing legislation immediately, suggesting that a longer-term approach to expanding federal coverage may emerge.

Congressional Happenings

Democrats Prepare Expanded Oversight of HHS and Federal Health Policies

Following their midterm election victories, congressional Democrats are preparing to launch investigations and oversight hearings into the Trump Administration's healthcare policies when they take control of Congress in January. Early efforts are expected to focus on federal Medicaid spending reductions, healthcare affordability, and funding and staffing levels at federal health agencies. With control of congressional committees, Democrats will gain expanded authority to subpoena witnesses, request records, and investigate agency decision-making. (Axios)

Key Areas of Oversight:

- **HHS leadership and vaccine policy:** Lawmakers are expected to scrutinize HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s changes to vaccine recommendations, potential political interference in scientific decision-making, and questions surrounding his financial interests in vaccine litigation.
- **Federal health agency funding and staffing:** Oversight could examine staffing reductions, research grant decisions, and budget cuts affecting agencies including CDC, NIH, and FDA.
- **Healthcare affordability and coverage:** Congressional committees are expected to investigate Medicaid spending reductions, ACA marketplace challenges, prescription drug pricing agreements, and hospital billing practices.

What's Next. The House Oversight, Energy and Commerce, and Ways and Means committees, along with the Senate HELP and Finance committees, are expected to lead these efforts. Incoming committee leaders, including Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), are positioned to play prominent roles.

Administration Updates

CDC Awards Grant to Advance Antibiotic Stewardship and Tissue Safety in Dentistry

On November 12, the American Dental Association (ADA) announced a new five-year cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to strengthen antibiotic stewardship and improve tissue graft safety in dentistry.

Through the agreement, the ADA will work with CDC's Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion and other experts to develop evidence-based antibiotic prescribing guidance and resources that help dental practices use health information technology to support appropriate prescribing. The initiative will also develop guidance on the safe use of human tissue grafts, including improved clinical documentation, informed consent, and product traceability. (ADA)

CMS Awards $10 Billion to States for Rural Health Transformation in Year Two

On November 9, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced $10 billion in second-year funding awards to all 50 states through the Rural Health Transformation Program. Established under the 2025 Republican tax and spending law, the five-year, $50 billion initiative is intended to improve rural healthcare access, strengthen the health workforce, expand preventive services, and support new models of care delivery.

With the latest awards, CMS has distributed $20 billion to states under the program, with an additional $30 billion scheduled over the remaining three years. States are expected to use the funding to advance their individual rural health transformation plans. (HHS)

ICYMI: Recent Dental Headlines

- Roll Call: 15 lessons from the midterms as Democrats rebound with historic wave
- Axios: Democrats unite against corporate health care
- Center for Medicare Advocacy: Senate Seeking Feedback on Long-Term Care Proposals
- Georgetown CCF: Millions of Low-Income Children Are Losing Both Medicaid/CHIP Coverage and SNAP Benefits
- Georgetown CCF: Will Lawmakers Heed the Call for More Affordable Health Care by Expanding Medicaid in TX, GA, KS & WI?

What's Ahead

- **November 23–27:** U.S. House and Senate in recess for Thanksgiving.
- **December 11:** Current federal government funding expires under the continuing resolution. Congress must pass FY 2027 appropriations legislation or another funding extension to avoid a government shutdown.

Federal Bill Tracker | Oral Health Issues

NEW! H.R. 10419 - SMILE for Veterans Act

Introduced by Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI) and five bipartisan cosponsors, the Supporting Mobile and Integrated Local Examinations (SMILE) for Veterans Act would establish a VA pilot program to expand access to preventive, restorative, and urgent dental services for veterans in rural communities. The program would partner with community-based dental providers, including mobile dental clinics, to serve eligible veterans who lack VA dental benefits or face barriers accessing existing VA dental services. The pilot would operate in at least 10 locations across five states.

Actions:

- September 16, 2026: Introduced in the House and referred to the Veterans' Affairs Committee.
- September 29, 2026: Referred to the Subcommittee on Health.

NEW! H.R. 10676 - Foster Youth Dental Act of 2026

Introduced by Reps. Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) and Don Bacon (R-NE), this bipartisan legislation would expand Medicaid coverage of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services, including dental care, to current and former foster youth through age 25. The bill would also establish minimum Medicaid dental reimbursement rates for services provided to these individuals, with enhanced federal funding to support implementation. The legislation aims to improve continuity of coverage and access to dental care for young adults transitioning out of foster care.

Actions:

- October 1, 2026: Introduced in the House.
- October 1, 2026: Referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

NEW! H.R. 10751 - Tribal Oral Health Sovereignty Act

Introduced by Reps. Jack Bergman (R-MI), Tom Cole (R-OK), and Sharice Davids (D-KS), this bipartisan legislation would amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to remove federal restrictions on dental therapists practicing under the Community Health Aide Program. The bill would allow dental therapists certified through recognized tribal or federal standards to provide services within their authorized scope in Indian health programs, regardless of conflicting state licensing restrictions. The proposal aims to strengthen tribal authority over oral healthcare delivery and expand access to dental services in tribal communities.

Actions:

- October 6, 2026: Introduced in the House.
- October 6, 2026: Referred to the House Natural Resources and Energy and Commerce Committees.

NEW Actions! S. 1677 / H.R. 3277 - Ensuring Lasting Smiles Act (ELSA)

Introduced by Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Joni Ernst (R-IA), and Reps. Neal Dunn (R-FL) and Kim Schrier (D-WA), this bipartisan legislation would require private group and individual health insurance plans to cover medically necessary treatment of congenital anomalies and birth defects affecting the eyes, ears, teeth, mouth, or jaw. Covered services would include reconstructive procedures and related dental and orthodontic treatment, addressing insurance coverage gaps for individuals born with conditions such as cleft lip and palate.

Actions:

- May 8, 2025: Introduced in the House and Senate.
- May 8, 2025: S. 1677 referred to the Senate HELP Committee; H.R. 3277 referred to the House Energy and Commerce, Education and Workforce, and Ways and Means Committees.
- March 19, 2026: Senate HELP Committee held a hearing involving S. 1677.
- **September 17 and 28, 2026:** Sens. John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Bernie Moreno (R-OH), respectively, joined as cosponsors.

NEW Actions! S. 942 / H.R. 2028 - Resident Education Deferred Interest (REDI) Act

Introduced by Sens. John Boozman (R-AR) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV), and Reps. Brian Babin (R-TX) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA), this bipartisan legislation would allow medical and dental residents to defer interest accrual on eligible federal student loans during accredited internship and residency programs. The bill aims to reduce the financial burden of postgraduate training and support recruitment and retention in the healthcare workforce, including dental specialties.

Actions:

- March 11, 2025: Introduced in the House and Senate.
- March 11, 2025: S. 942 referred to the Senate HELP Committee; H.R. 2028 referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee.
- March 19, 2026: Senate HELP Committee considered the legislation during a Member Day hearing.
- September 2026: A coalition of more than 40 medical and healthcare organizations urged Congress to advance the legislation.
- **September–October 2026:** Additional House cosponsors joined, including Reps. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Mark Messmer (R-IN).

H.R. 2001 - Action for Dental Health Act

Introduced by Reps. Robin Kelly (D-IL) and Mike Simpson (R-ID) in 2025, the bipartisan bill would reauthorize HRSA's Action for Dental Health program through FY 2030. The program supports grants to address dental workforce needs and improve access to oral health care in dental health professional shortage areas.

Actions:

- Introduced in the House on March 3, 2025
- Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
- Committee Consideration and Mark-up Session Held on May 21, 2026
- Bill advanced to Full House by unanimous voice vote on May 21, 2026
- Reported by House Committee on Energy and Commerce on July 2, 2026
- Placed on Union calendar on July 2, 2026
- **Passed the House by voice vote on July 20, 2026**
- **Received in the Senate and referred to the Senate HELP Committee on July 21, 2026**

Separately, Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Ted Budd (R-NC) **introduced a Senate version of the Action for Dental Health Act on July 23**, which would authorize $15 million annually for FY 2027–2031.

S. 5091 / H.R. 9831 – Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2026

Introduced by Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD) and Rep. Nanette Barragán (D-CA), the legislation would make comprehensive dental and oral health services a mandatory Medicaid benefit for adults nationwide, rather than an optional benefit determined by individual states. The proposal also provides enhanced federal financial support for implementation.

Actions:

- Introduced in the House and Senate on July 22, 2026
- H.R. 9831 referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee
- S. 5091 referred to the Senate Finance Committee

S. 5088 / H.R. 9833 – Ensuring Kids Have Access to Medically Necessary Dental Care Act

Introduced by Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD) and Rep. Nanette Barragán (D-CA), the bill would strengthen dental coverage under the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by prohibiting annual and lifetime dollar limits on dental benefits and requiring dental-only wraparound coverage for certain children who have other health insurance but remain eligible for CHIP.

Actions:

- Introduced in the House and Senate on July 22, 2026
- S. 5088 referred to the Senate Finance Committee
- House companion introduced as H.R. 9833

S. 5089 / H.R. 9832 – Medicare Dental Benefit Act

Introduced by Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD) and Rep. Nanette Barragán (D-CA), this legislation would amend Medicare to establish coverage of dental services, addressing the longstanding exclusion of routine dental care from the traditional Medicare benefit.

Actions:

- Introduced in the House and Senate on July 22, 2026
- S. 5089 referred to the Senate Finance Committee
- House companion introduced as H.R. 9832

S. 4110 – EMPOWER for Health Act

Introduced by Sens. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), the bipartisan bill would reauthorize federal health professions workforce programs under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act. The legislation includes continued support for oral health workforce programs in general dentistry, pediatric dentistry, public health dentistry, and dental hygiene, as well as the Dental Faculty Loan Repayment Program.

Actions:

- Introduced in the Senate on March 17, 2026
- Referred to the Senate HELP Committee
- **Advanced by the Senate HELP Committee on July 22, 2026**

S. 4370 – Primary Care Team Education Centers Act

Introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA), the bill would establish and expand primary care team education centers that provide educational and clinical training opportunities for health professionals, including dental hygienists and dental assistants. The centers would build on the community-based Teaching Health Center model and help prepare health professionals to practice in rural and underserved areas facing workforce shortages.

Actions:

- Introduced in the Senate on April 22, 2026
- Referred to the Senate HELP Committee

S. 4008 - Promoting Dental Health Act

Introduced by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), this bill would reauthorize federal oral health promotion and disease-prevention programs, including support for the CDC's Oral Health program, through 2031. The CDC Oral Health program is currently funded at $20.25 million annually and supports state-based activities such as oral health surveillance, dental education, school sealant programs for low-income children, workforce development, and efforts to prevent cavities, gum disease, and other oral health conditions. (Full Press Release)

Actions:

- Introduced in the Senate on March 5, 2026
- Referred to the Senate HELP Committee

H.R. 7931 - Improving Dental Administration Act of 2026

Introduced by Reps. Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ) and Herb Conaway (D-NJ), this bill would amend Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) to require self-funded dental plans to adhere to state-level consumer protection and insurance laws, increasing accountability and transparency for patients and providers. (ADA News)

Actions:

- Introduced in the House on March 12, 2026
- Referred to the House Committee on Education and Workforce