



## Health Policy Briefing

July 25, 2016

### Republicans Finalize Party Platform

The Republican Party formally approved their policy **platform** at the GOP convention last week. Much of the platform focuses on well-known social conservative issues, such as repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The party pushes for medical liability reform and regulatory changes at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to speed drugs from development to market. Republicans also call for the criminalization of acquiring, transferring, or selling fetal tissue donations. The platform supports the use of block grants in the Medicaid program, as well as the use of a premium support option for future Medicare enrollees under the age of 55. On other issues relating to health care, there are some notable gaps between party leadership and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. Trump has promised to defend Medicare against future cuts, which is at odds with some principles included in the final platform. Additionally, allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices was not included in the platform, despite support from Trump throughout his campaign. When he was questioned about this proposal at the Convention, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Texas) decisively denied that he would back the idea, citing data that indicates that government negotiation of drug prices would not save money.

#### *Administration to Support Rural Areas Fight Addiction*

The Obama Administration has announced \$9 million in grants to rural health officials in Oklahoma, Colorado, and Pennsylvania over the next three years to help combat recent increases in overdose deaths. The money will allow the states to use a telemedicine-style training program to expand addiction treatment in areas that are underserved by health care providers. Known as Project ECHO, this model allows rural primary care doctors to watch videos by specialists trained in anti-addiction treatment. Project ECHO has previously been proven successful in teaching providers how to treat hepatitis C.

#### *Inside*

PCORI Approves \$153 Million in Comparative Effectiveness Research.....	2
Health Care at the Republican National Convention.....	2
Zika Update.....	2
Democrats Release Party Platform.....	2
Recently Introduced Health Legislation.....	3

### ***PCORI Approves \$153 Million in Comparative Effectiveness Research***

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) has approved \$153 million to support 28 patient-centered comparative clinical effectiveness research studies. PCORI also approved seven projects related to improving comparative effectiveness research methods. The funds will support work on a range of conditions and problems posing high burdens on patients, caregivers, and the health care system, including chronic pain, multiple sclerosis (MS), and treatment-resistant depression. Other projects will focus on the effectiveness of blood-thinning medications to treat blood clots in the veins and lungs, as well as low-molecular-weight heparins and aspirin to prevent clots in patients with broken bones. PCORI has approved more 549 studies and related projects since 2012, totaling more than \$1.4 billion.

### ***Health Care at the Republican National Convention***

While issues pertaining to health care were mentioned during the Republican National Convention last week, they certainly were not the focus of the week's events. Although most speeches focused on the economy, immigration, or the threat of ISIS, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell did mention Zika and opioids during his speech, blaming Democrats for blocking a bill to fund the fight against the Zika virus before it could spread. He credited his party for the legislative package to counter opioid misuse passed by both the House and Senate earlier this month. Speakers also referenced the Party's longstanding positions regarding repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), defunding of Planned Parenthood, and opposition to abortion. Speakers also stressed the importance of health care affordability under a Trump presidency.

### ***Zika Update***

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it would be distributing \$60 million to state and local health departments to help them fight the Zika virus. The grants will be for the specific purpose of epidemiological surveillance, mosquito control and monitoring, improving lab capacity, and participation in a registry that tracks pregnant women infected with Zika and their infants. The new funding comes from the \$589 million reprogrammed from Ebola response and other administrative priorities, and will be available on August 1. Officials in Florida and at the CDC are investigating whether an incidence of Zika in Miami-Dade County was the first to be transmitted within the continental U.S. The health department has not specified whether the case could have been transmitted through sexual contact, blood transfusion, or other known ways of transmission. Florida officials will work with CDC to launch an epidemiological study. According to the most recent data from CDC, there are now 5,321 cases of Zika across the U.S. and its territories. Of the 1,404 within the United States, 15 have been sexually transmitted and one was laboratory acquired.

### ***Democrats Release Party Platform***

The Democratic Party released the final version of their **platform** last week. In addition to longstanding Democratic positions like preserving the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and women's reproductive rights, the platform focuses on the affordability and accessibility of care, as well as the need to fund the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and research that will accelerate the pace of medical progress. The platform expresses support for expanding ACA waivers to permit states to experiment with universal coverage. The Party also urges repeal of the ACA's Cadillac tax on high-cost employer health insurance plans. The platform criticizes Republicans for failing to pass emergency funding to combat the Zika virus. In addition to a commitment to crack down on runaway prescription drug prices, the platform also includes language in support of a public option and allowing Americans to opt in to Medicare at the age of 55.

## **Recently Introduced Health Legislation**

*H.R. 5921 (introduced by Rep. Bucshon): A bill to amend title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act to change the permissible age variation in health insurance premium rates; to the Committee on Energy and Commerce; July 21*

*H.R. 5923 (introduced by Rep. Israel): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make grants to eligible entities to train elementary and secondary school nurses on how to respond to a biological or chemical attack or an outbreak of pandemic illness in a school building or on school grounds; to the Committee on Energy and Commerce; July 21*