

The **UNITED STATES SENATE**
COMMITTEE *on* **FINANCE**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2021

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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on President Biden’s Fiscal Year 2022 HHS
Budget**
As Prepared for Delivery

This morning the Finance Committee welcomes Secretary Becerra to discuss the president’s 2022 budget proposal for the Department of Health and Human Services. There’s a lot to talk about this morning. I’m going to begin with out-of-control drug prices.

Far too many Americans are getting clobbered with every trip to pick up their medications at the pharmacy window. The latest drug pricing news is the approval of Aduhelm, a new medication for Alzheimer’s disease – one of the chronic diseases that now define Medicare in the modern day. The drug’s approval was controversial. There is little data showing it actually does what the company says it will do. Despite that, Aduhelm has an unconscionable list price of \$56,000 per year. Let’s understand, it is not a cure, like some other recent breakthrough drugs have been. Patients could be on Aduhelm for years at a time after their diagnosis, multiplying the overall cost of treatment.

Setting aside the lack of clear evidence that this new Alzheimer’s drug actually works, medical science today is capable of miracles. The speedy development of highly-effective coronavirus vaccines is one example. Everybody in this room welcomes and cheers those advances. However, Americans are terrified by the status quo on drug pricing. Not only are too many Americans forgoing or rationing their prescriptions, sky-high drug prices could bust our health care budgets.

I’m working to update the Finance Committee’s prescription drug legislation from the last Congress, and I welcome the ideas of all members of the committee. I believe it’s long past time to give Medicare the authority to negotiate better prices for prescription drugs on behalf of more than 50 million seniors. Overwhelmingly, the American people support that idea. President Biden, during his Joint Session speech in April, called on the Congress to get it done.

We are all hungry for genuine medical breakthroughs, but what does it mean, Senators, if the vast majority of Americans cannot afford them?

A few other issues related to the budget proposal and the administration’s HHS priorities. It’s very welcome to see proposals on mental health, because mental health care is a major priority for this committee. We’ll have a lot more to say on mental health during our Finance Committee hearing on the topic next week.

As I've discussed with Secretary Becerra, I look forward to continuing to work with his team on further implementation of the CHRONIC Care Act, specifically expanding its benefits to those receiving traditional Medicare. That way, the law Congress passed back in 2018 will continue to update the Medicare guarantee.

I'm also pleased that the administration is going to continue making progress on the issue of transparency and sunlight with respect to health care prices. It's important to make sure that progress is useful to consumers as part of an overall effort to make health care more affordable.

The budget includes a proposal for a landmark investment of \$400 billion to expand access to home and community based services through Medicaid. This would be an absolute game-changer resulting in more choices and better care for millions of seniors and people with disabilities.

Senator Casey and I, along with a lot of other members on this committee, are working nights and weekends to get this done. We're also interested in building up the care workforce to make sure these changes deliver on their huge potential.

On the subject of helping the most vulnerable Americans out there, I'll close on child welfare. A few years ago this committee passed legislation called the Family First Act to help more families stay together safely instead of relying on foster care. One of our key goals was to get more help to Black and Native American families, whose kids are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. However, the Trump administration gave short shrift to the implementation of this law, and it is not living up to its promise for a lot of those vulnerable youngsters.

The Biden administration has an opportunity to change that. It is also proposing a new grant program that ought to help address racial disparities in the foster care system. I'm looking forward to working with Secretary Becerra on these issues. There are a lot of kids and families who will benefit from it.

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