



Welcome to *Washington Update*, the weekly e-newsletter on the latest health care happenings in the nation's capital that affect APG's members.

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## **Killing Of UnitedHealthcare CEO Sparks Shock, Sorrow, And Outrage**

The tragic [fatal shooting](#) of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York earlier this week is simultaneously fueling a health insurance [backlash on social media](#) and [concerns](#) about the safety of health industry leaders, according to news reports. A manhunt continued late this week for the suspect, who apparently left behind [bullet casings](#) at the crime scene with the words “deny,” “defend” and “depose” written on them, other news accounts quoting police sources said.

Still other news accounts indicated that Thompson had received various unspecified threats prior to the shooting. His death follows years of reports of [growing violence](#) against physicians, nurses, and other workers in health care settings, often by disgruntled patients.

In a [statement](#), UnitedHealth Group CEO Andrew Witty said, “While our hearts are broken, we have been touched by the huge outpouring of kindness and support in the hours since this horrific crime took place...We are thankful, even as we grieve.”

APG joins our fellow organizations throughout health care in expressing condolences to Mr. Thompson's family and friends and to UHG on this senseless tragedy.



## **Year-End Congressional Health Package Still Appears To Face Long Odds Of Passage**

Although Congressional Democrats and Republicans traded offers this week over components of a year-end health care package, multiple speed bumps and possibly insurmountable barriers lie ahead. Meanwhile, just two weeks remain for Congress to strike a deal if such a package is to be included in an extension of the fiscal 2024 budgetary continuing resolution (CR) set to expire at midnight on Dec. 21.

There is strong bipartisan support for some elements of a potential package, including extension of pandemic-era telehealth flexibilities in Medicare and the Acute Hospital Care at Home waiver program. More problematic – in part because of the cost – is incorporating a partial or full rollback of the nearly 3 percent Medicare physician fee cut set to take effect on Jan. 1, as well as extension of the Advanced Alternative Payment Model bonuses that expire with the current performance year.

**Sticking points:** At issue are the “pay fors,” or provisions to offset the budgetary impact of such changes to avoid further swelling of the federal budget deficit. Republicans have proposed to delay a key Biden administration initiative: blocking or phasing in more slowly new [nursing home staffing requirements](#), a measure seen as a dead letter by many Democrats. Backers have also hoped to see a health package include final passage of a [bill](#) that passed the House unanimously in 2022 and that would spur electronic prior authorization by Medicare Advantage plans, enable gold card programs for providers, and other measures. But even this element would require a budgetary offset to cover the cost to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to implement the measure.

As previously [reported](#) in *Washington Update*, an extension of the current CR is likely to fund the government at fiscal 2024 levels until March, when the new Congress and administration can finalize details of the fiscal 2025 budget. The House is expected to vote first on the CR extension during the week of Dec. 16 and then leave Washington on its holiday recess. The Senate would then take up the legislation ahead of the Dec. 21 midnight deadline.

With time running short, and the parties still far apart on many issues, it seems likely that most health care measures, including a modification of the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule cut, will now

be delayed until March. APG will continue to keep members apprised of developments.



## In Case You Missed It

- President-elect Donald J. Trump has **continued to shape the team that will oversee health care matters in his incoming administration**, with the following individuals being identified as nominees: For Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, [Jim O'Neill](#); for Director of the National Institutes of Health, [Jay Bhattacharya](#), MD, PhD; for Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, [Marty Makary](#), MD; for Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, former Representative [Dave Weldon](#) (R-FL); and for Surgeon General, [Janette Nesheiwat](#), MD. Formal nominations and confirmation hearings are likely to follow in late January and February.
- UnitedHealthcare's and Centene's Medicare Advantage (MA) Star Ratings for 2025 have been increased by CMS in **the latest development in the ongoing legal battle between MA plans and the agency** over the ratings. Under the [recalculations](#) that CMS disclosed this week, Centene gained its sole four-star contract, and two UnitedHealthcare contracts were upgraded to five stars and three to four stars.
- Details for the **new mandatory hospital-focused Increasing Organ Transplant Access (IOTA) model were finalized** this week by CMS. In addition to the kidney transplant model, which will begin July 1, 2025, the finalized policies will also apply to the mandatory Radiation Oncology (RO) and ESRD Treatment Choices (ETC) models.
- APG member UCLA medical group has [published results](#) showing that use of its "home grown" **artificial intelligence care management software** led to a "onetime, significant, sizable reduction in preventable [hospital admission] HA rates."



## APG Announcements And Offerings

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