

Healthcare Preview For the Week Of: May 8, 2023

Article By:

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Debt-Limit Discussions and Ending the PHE

On Tuesday, President Biden will meet with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell at the White House to discuss the debt ceiling. With a possible default date of June 1, there are precious few working days left in May in which both the House and Senate are in session to come to an agreement. This scenario suggests that a short-term fix to temporarily extend the deadline could become the plausible outcome. The other big news this week is the official ending of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) on May 11.

Both the House and the Senate are in session, with health-related activity on Wednesday and Thursday. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee will hold a hearing Wednesday on insulin affordability. And on Thursday, the committee is scheduled to return to an executive session to consider four bills:

- The Ensuring Timely Access to Generics Act
- The Expanding Access to Low-Cost Generics Act
- The Retaining Access and Restoring Exclusivity (RARE) Act
- The Pharmacy Benefit Manager Reform Act.

This action was postponed last week to allow senators to hear from witnesses at Wednesday's hearing, and to provide additional time for necessary Congressional Budget Office input and technical assistance from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before proceeding with the markup.

The House Ways & Means Health Subcommittee will also meet Wednesday for a hearing entitled "Examining Policies that Inhibit Innovation and Patient Access," which will review the Inflation Reduction Act's potential effects on prescription drug development and innovation.

The House Energy & Commerce Committee will hold a hearing focusing on the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). As with last week's Senate HELP hearing on the same topic,

top officials from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the FDA will serve as panelists. PAHPA needs to be reauthorized before its September 30 expiration date. This reauthorization is particularly significant as the COVID-19 PHE comes to an end.

Thursday marks the official end of the COVID-19 PHE. While COVID-19 has not been eradicated, PHEs are temporary by definition, and we have moved toward living with and learning from COVID-19. We are also looking to integrate those learnings into our health system moving forward. There are many unknowns as we shape this future: What outcomes data do we have showing what we've done better? What flexibilities will still be permissible post-PHE? Do we need the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services or Congress to take additional actions? We look forward to answering these questions in the coming weeks and months.

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