

## U.S. Congress Unveils Large Spending Package with Major Health Care Wins

On Dec. 20, congressional leaders unveiled a massive \$1.6 trillion [4,000+ page omnibus spending package](#) with a number of significant health care priorities supported by WHA.

Among the notable health care items included in the package are:

- An extension of the Medicare-Dependent and Low-Volume Hospital Designations through Oct. 1, 2024.
- A continuation of incentive payments for certain advance payment models (value-based care), though at 3.5% instead of the current 5% rate.
- An extension of the Acute Hospital Care at Home program through all of 2024.
- An extension of current telehealth flexibilities made possible through section 1135 waivers through all of 2024.
- Reducing the scheduled Medicare physician fee schedule cuts by 2.5 percentage points (from a 4.5% cut to a 2% cut) in 2023 and by 1.25 percentage points in 2024.
- Preventing the scheduled 4% statutory PAYGO cuts from taking effect.
- Behavioral health coverage expansion - expanding Medicare eligible practitioners to include marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors.
- Workforce support:
  - 200 additional Medicare funded GME slots – with an emphasis on psychiatry residencies.
  - Extend the CONRAD-30 J-1 Visa Waiver program that allows foreign-born physicians to stay and practice in the U.S. without having to return to their home country after completing their residency.
  - Key elements of Senator Baldwin's [BIO Preparedness Workforce Act](#) which provides loan repayment supporting our infectious disease and emergency planning workforce.

As covered in past editions of *The Valued Voice*, WHA has advocated for many of these items during fly-ins to Washington, D.C. throughout 2022 in [April](#), [June](#), [September](#), and earlier in [December](#). WHA also activated a HEAT alert campaign late last week urging WHA members to contact their federal representatives to build support for including these provisions in a year-end funding package.



The U.S. Senate approved the omnibus spending package on Dec. 23 by a [bipartisan vote of 68-29](#). As of press time, the legislation had not been approved in the House, but Congressional leaders said they were optimistic they would beat the Dec. 23 deadline to pass this legislation in order to avoid a federal government shutdown.

Contact WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations [Jon Hoelter](#) with questions.

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