

# Snapshot: How HHS is Building a Healthier America

**IN 2021**, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) worked to deliver on the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, reduce health care costs, expand access to care, tackle health disparities, and strengthen behavioral health care — all with the goal of building a healthier America.

In the coming year, HHS will continue to play a major role in the Administration’s government-wide efforts to build a healthy America, by charting a course to Build Back Better with rules and policies designed to help protect public health and save lives.

The following is a snapshot of key HHS initiatives from the past year, reflecting examples of how HHS worked to advance its top priorities and focuses:

- ✔ Tackling the COVID-19 pandemic
- ✔ Reducing health care costs and expanding access to care
- ✔ Addressing health disparities
- ✔ Strengthening behavioral health care
- ✔ Fulfilling a legal responsibility to care for unaccompanied children
- ✔ Restoring America’s role as global health leader

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

### Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Providing surge support for states, territories, and tribal nations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic*

- ✔ Clinical teams from HHS’s Office of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) division and the U.S. Public Health Commissioned Corps have provided a range of support — from **monoclonal antibody and testing support to addressing emergency room and hospital capacity**.
- ✔ Since July 2021, 40 National Disaster Medical System teams — **nearly 880 team members** — **were deployed to support sites** in 19 states and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.



- ✓ In addition, HHS staff have been deployed from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to **conduct contact tracing, vaccine, laboratory, and health communications support**.
- ✓ Since the beginning of the pandemic, HHS has **deployed more than 250 million items from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)** to aid the national response over the course of the pandemic, including deploying more than 3,000 ventilators to 17 jurisdictions.
- ✓ HHS has made **significant progress in restoring the SNS to pre-pandemic levels**: 747 million N95 respirators (59 times pre-pandemic levels); 274 million surgical and procedure face masks (8.5 times pre-pandemic levels); 19.6 million face shields (two times pre-pandemic levels); 59.6 million gowns and coveralls (12.5 times pre-pandemic levels); 4 billion gloves (240 times pre-pandemic levels); and 158,000 ventilators (10 times pre-pandemic levels).
- ✓ Secured **\$100 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to strengthen the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)**, a network of medical and public health volunteers organized locally to improve the health of their communities. The MRC has added more than 100,000 volunteers since the beginning of the pandemic.

### ***Leading a COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force***

- ✓ The **task force launched to provide recommendations to mitigate** inequities caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and for preventing such inequities in the future.
  - Recently, the Task Force **suggested five actions to prioritize**:
    - empower and invest in community-led solutions to address health equity;
    - enforce a data ecosystem that promotes equity-driven decision-making;
    - increase accountability for health equity outcomes;
    - invest in a representative health care workforce and increase equitable access to quality health for all and;
    - lead and coordinate implementation of the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force’s recommendations from a permanent health equity infrastructure in the White House

### ***Driving a public education campaign to boost vaccine confidence***

- ✓ Our campaign **routinely mobilizes a network** — coined its **Community Corps** — of 17,000+ volunteers, including 1,000 physicians, to boost vaccine confidence. Trusted voices work in all states, territories and tribal areas to reach communities where they are.
- ✓ We also **routinely provide resources and materials to health care providers, community health centers, and trusted voices** in communities nationwide.



- ✓ Over the airwaves and on the roadways, the **campaign lifts up messages about vaccine confidence**, with TV ads airing during each critical chapter of the Administration's vaccination efforts and public health experts traveling routinely across the country to amplify them.
- ✓ Campaign **toolkits of resources for partners include materials translated into up to 14 languages**, routinely.

### ***Making vaccines free and widely available to all Americans***

- ✓ HHS established the **HHS Coordination Operations and Response Element (H-CORE)**, within Office of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), to lead the procurement and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics, carrying forward the mission that had previously been done by the HHS-DOD Countermeasures Acceleration Group (CAG).
- ✓ **More than 950 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been approved** by ASPR for distribution.

### ***Donating more vaccines globally than any other country***

- ✓ To date, ASPR has directly supported **the transfer of over 142 million vaccine doses to 101 countries**.

### ***Investing in a medicine cabinet of COVID-19 treatments for those who get sick***

- ✓ We've bought nearly **30 million courses of COVID-19 therapies**, including monoclonal antibodies and antivirals, for patients who get sick. Courses are provided to states and territories weekly, at no cost.

### ***Supporting testing access and equity to drive early disease identification and intervention***

- ✓ Fought for and **secured a historic amount of funding to bolster testing** in the near and long-term.
  - Invested **\$3 billion to accelerate the production of rapid tests and expand capacity**. As a result, ASPR has more than quadrupled the number of rapid at-home tests available since first making those investments in September.
  - We went from zero OTC antigen tests on the market in January 2021 — to **300 million tests per month in December**.



- ✓ **Centered equity:** Provide testing access where it is needed most, including communities at higher risk, testing for uninsured individuals, and to support the Increasing Community Access to Testing program, which has tested more than 29 million people in more than 10,000 pharmacies and more than 800 surge sites. There are also now over 10,000 state- and locally-run community sites offering free testing generally with FEMA or CDC support — for a total of over **20,000 free testing sites** across the country.
- ✓ Used ARP funding to make access to testing easier for the uninsured, including **investing nearly \$5 billion to [cover testing costs](#) for the uninsured.**
- ✓ Made **unprecedented CDC investment in testing and mitigation** for underserved communities to address historic disparities, as well as new investments in rural clinics and hospital testing.

### *Investing in the rapid testing infrastructure and testing workforce*

- ✓ Funded **\$8.9 billion for test manufacturing capacity, procurement, distribution, and materials** to support the supply of tests.
- ✓ Invested in the lab, contact-tracing and other workforce, as well as **supported lab infrastructure and genomic sequencing to improve response.** This increased ability to detect variants by 20-fold.
- ✓ Made **[eight individual at-home over-the-counter COVID-19 tests available per month](#)** for people enrolled in private health insurance plans. That means a family of four can get 32 tests per month for free.

### *Making screening testing a priority by investing in programs to identify disease early*

- ✓ **Made screening testing a goal and priority** — with ARP funding, prioritized school screening testing and testing in congregate settings like shelters and prisons. Worked with CDC and FDA to release clinical guidance making the scientific case for regular screening testing.

### *Investing in community health centers*

- ✓ Awarded **more than [\\$7.3 billion in American Rescue Plan](#) funding to nearly 1,400 community health centers** nationwide to mitigate COVID-19 and expanded health services, including over **[\\$1 billion](#)** available to support major construction and renovation projects tied to COVID-19 mitigation.
- ✓ Awarded over **[\\$32 million to health centers](#)** to ensure staff receive training and support to provide equitable access to COVID-19 vaccination, testing, and treatment.



### ***Increasing vaccine access in underserved communities***

- ✔ Jointly **working with USPS to make COVID-19 tests available for free** to every person who signs up at [covidtests.gov](https://covidtests.gov).
- ✔ As of December 31, 2021, a total of more than 17 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered through HHS's Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program, with **67 percent going to racial and/or ethnic minority patients**. In total, of 18,227,259 COVID-19 vaccine doses that have been administered by health centers, **68 percent have been administered to racial and/or ethnic minority patients**.
- ✔ **Indian Health Services, tribal, and urban Indian program** sites receiving the vaccine through the IHS have reported administering 2,066,195 doses of the COVID 19 vaccine as of October 31, 2021.
- ✔ **Distributed \$424.7 million to over 4,200 rural health clinics for testing and mitigation**. As of January 10, 2022, 198 Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) in 30 states are participating in the HRSA RHC COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Program and have placed orders for a total of 243,250 doses of COVID-19 vaccines (226,750 non-pediatric; 16,500 pediatric).
- ✔ HRSA **awarded \$323 million to 150 community-based organizations** for COVID-19 vaccine outreach and education initiatives to reach vulnerable and medically underserved communities.
- ✔ The Administration for Community Living and CDC partnered to provide **\$100 million in funding** to ACL's aging and disability networks to assist people with disabilities and older adults in overcoming barriers to accessing vaccines and to fund national hotlines to connect older adults and people with disabilities with local supports to assist with access to vaccines and other critical community services.

### ***Investing in public health infrastructure more broadly***

- ✔ Through ARP, HHS's directed **\$100 million to bolster the Medical Reserve Corps** — the most money ever allocated to the Corps since its inception in 2002 — along with an additional \$200 million to support the Nurse Corps.
- ✔ Issued grants totaling \$1.4 billion to **help older adults recover from the pandemic**.
- ✔ Through ARP, ACL provided \$150 million to expand the **public health workforce** to respond to the needs of people with disabilities and older adults.
- ✔ Launched the **Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program, a first-of-its-kind water assistance program** to help households hit especially hard financially access water.



## Reducing Health Care Costs/Expanding Access to Care

- ✔ Working across all federal and private insurance programs, HHS is advancing more equitable coverage, working to ensure that the uninsured receive coverage and that HHS is going to communities with the most needs to deliver care and coverage.

### *Medicaid and CHIP*

- ✔ Medicaid and Children Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollment is at an all-time high, with [more than 83 million children and adults currently enrolled](#).
- ✔ Two states — **Oklahoma and Missouri** — expanded Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act this past year.
- ✔ Increased funding and access to home and community-based services for Medicaid beneficiaries.

### *Healthcare.gov and Marketplace Coverage*

- ✔ Amid the ongoing pandemic, launched a 2021 Special Enrollment Period on Healthcare.gov from February 15, 2021 through August 15, 2021 that resulted in 2.5 million Americans newly gaining coverage. Combined with State-based Marketplaces, [2.8 million people](#) in total newly gained coverage during this period.
- ✔ Launched 2022 Open Enrollment with record-low premiums, where [four out of five people can find a plan for \\$10 or less per month with newly expanded financial assistance](#), and an extended period to give everyone needing insurance adequate time to find most affordable insurance options.
- ✔ [Nearly five million Americans newly gained health care coverage in 2021](#) through the ACA Health Insurance Marketplaces.
- ✔ During this year's historic Open Enrollment, HHS worked to reach out to communities nationwide, investing in Navigators to help people get covered, providing education and information to communities of color, rural communities and others to better reach and provide coverage.
  - We **quadrupled the number of Navigators available** to people who need assistance getting covered, bringing the number to approximately 1,500. As a result of this work, a record 14.2 million people [got covered through both Healthcare.gov and State-Based Marketplaces](#) by January 15, 2022.



### ***Transparency in Costs***

- ✔ Implemented [new bipartisan consumer protections](#) to shield millions of Americans from surprise medical bills and provide transparency in coverage of health care. This new law also allows individuals who are uninsured or self-pay to get information about the cost of care up front, and if the cost is greater than \$400 or more, allows these patients to negotiate a better price. These new protections, authorized under the No Surprises Act, took effect January 1, 2022.
- ✔ [Strengthened the hospital price transparency](#) regulations to boost compliance and hold hospitals further fiscally accountable for noncompliance. Hospital price transparency helps people know the charges associated with items and services hospitals provide, so they can better plan for possible cost burdens.

### ***Lowering Costs***

- ✔ Released a comprehensive plan to lower drug prices through competition, innovation, and transparency. The plan is part of a broader initiative stemming from President Joe Biden's [Executive Order on Promoting Competition](#) in the American Economy, which also created the White House Competition Council tasked with coordinating, promoting, and advancing Federal Government efforts to address overconcentration, monopolization, and unfair competition in or directly affecting the American economy.
- ✔ Proposed [landmark FDA rule](#) to improve access to and reduce the cost of hearing aid technology for millions of Americans. The rule would allow hearing aids to be sold directly to consumers in stores or online without a medical exam or a fitting by an audiologist.

### ***Strengthening support for children and families***

- ✔ [Invested \\$1 billion](#) to support Family Violence and Prevention and Services Programs this year.
- ✔ Distributed nearly **\$8 billion in utility payment supports for low-income families** through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the largest amount in the program's history.
- ✔ Established the new [Low-Income Home Water Assistance Program \(LIHWAP\)](#) and awarded \$1.1 billion in water assistance to low-income families throughout the country.
- ✔ Awarded [\\$1 billion in funds](#) to Head Start programs nationwide to help them build back to fully operational, in-person comprehensive services.
- ✔ Helped over 68,000 Afghans on humanitarian parole or special immigrant visas permanently resettle.



- ✓ [Distributed \\$39 billion in child care relief funds](#) to support child care providers facing lost revenue and higher expenses to operate.

## Addressing Health Disparities

### *Building a first-of-its kind office to tackle climate change as a public health issue*

- ✓ Established the [new Office of Climate Change and Health Equity \(OCCHE\)](#) to protect vulnerable communities who disproportionately bear the brunt of pollution and climate-driven disasters, such as drought and wildfires, at the expense of public health.

### *Closing Graduate Medical Education health equity gaps*

- ✓ Begins the process of distributing [1,000 new Medicare-funded medical residency positions](#), beginning with 200 slots to hospitals in health professional shortage areas.
- ✓ Makes additional strides to close the health equity gap in rural communities by allowing rural training hospitals participating in accredited rural training tracks to receive increases in their GME cap.

### *Addressing health equity gap in Medicare quality programs*

- ✓ Took [strides to close health equity gaps in CMS quality programs](#), seeking input on a variety of ideas to revise CMS programs to make reporting of health disparities based on social risk factors and race and ethnicity more comprehensive and actionable for hospitals, providers and patients.

### *Strengthening access to public health information technology and health data*

- ✓ [Granted \\$73 million to minority-serving institutions](#) to strengthen public health information technology (IT) efforts, improve COVID-19 data collection, and increase minority representation in the public health IT workforce.
- ✓ [Advanced long-awaited regulations](#) implementing the 21st Century Cures Act Information Blocking requirement by setting penalties for health care actors that engage in practices that interfere with the access, exchange or use of electronic health information.

### *Investing in Maternal Health and addressing the Black maternal health crisis*

- ✓ Approved state proposals to [expand postpartum Medicaid coverage for mothers following delivery](#) for the first time in the history of the program in five states: Illinois, Georgia, Missouri, Virginia, and New Jersey. Virginia, Illinois, and New Jersey now provide 12-month postpartum coverage.





- ✓ **Made \$12 million available for the Rural Maternity and Obstetrics Management Strategies** program that tests models addressing the unmet needs of rural moms.
- ✓ Made a **\$350 million investment** to **expand home visiting services to families most in need**, increase access to doulas, address health disparities in infant deaths, and improve data reporting on maternal mortality.
- ✓ Created a **new measure in Medicare** that will **encourage hospitals to standardize protocols addressing obstetric emergencies** and complications arising during pregnancy.

### ***Investing in Tribal Health***

- ✓ Upheld the Administration's commitment to **honoring tribal sovereignty**, including Tribal voices in policy decision-making by engaging and participating in Tribal consultation regarding COVID-19 supplemental funding and budget formulation.
- ✓ In consultation with tribal governments, **distributed more than \$9 billion to support COVID-19 mitigation in Indian Country through IHS**—nearly **\$6 billion of which was provided in the ARP**. These resources have supported critical response activities, such as drive-thru testing sites, community vaccine distribution efforts, and the continued provision of high-quality health care in Indian Country.

### ***Investing in Rural Health***

- ✓ In 2021, thanks to the ARP, invested **almost \$16 billion to strengthen rural health**, including \$7.5 billion in ARP Rural payments to providers and suppliers who serve rural Medicaid, CHIP, and Medicare beneficiaries.

### ***Strengthening reproductive health care and nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQI+ communities***

- ✓ **Announced guidance to update enforcement on Section 1557** of the Affordable Care Act's prohibitions on sex discrimination, based on the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton*.
- ✓ Approved the first State **essential health benefit benchmark plan**, Colorado, to **require gender affirming care**. This option is now available for other states to also adopt this coverage policy.
- ✓ Finalized a new rule to **strengthen the Title X family planning program**, and **ensure access to equitable, affordable, quality family planning services** for everyone possible that took effect November 08, 2021.



- ✓ Released [\\$258 million in new funding opportunities to restore the Title X family planning provider network nationwide](#) to improve capacity and ensure more patients are served nationwide.
- ✓ Released a new [\\$10 million funding opportunity to help clinics in dire need, including in Texas](#) where patients have been impacted by a lack of access to care, as a result of the abortion ban, SB 8.
- ✓ Released new guidance on [Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act \(EMTALA\)](#) to help ensure that patients entitled to care can seek care in Texas other states with and the Church Amendment to support health care providers from discrimination as states pass restrictive abortion laws.

### ***Advancing equity, access and inclusion of people with disabilities***

- ✓ In celebration of the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, HHS [shared a variety of resources](#) and initiatives to promote inclusion and accessibility and uphold the rights of people with disabilities, including guidance explaining [when long COVID can be a disability](#) under federal civil rights laws and a [guide to the community-based resources](#) that can help people if they now need assistance to live in their own home, go to work or school, or participate in the community.

### ***Improving health and wellbeing of Americans***

- ✓ Issued [new guidance](#) aimed at reducing the amount of sodium in the U.S. food supply.
- ✓ [Committed to the process of banning menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars](#) to improve the health of all Americans and to tackle health disparities.
- ✓ CDC [updated its blood lead reference value \(BLRV\)](#) from 5 µg/dL to 3.5 µg/dL in response to the Lead Exposure Prevention and Advisory Committee (LEPAC) recommendation made on May 14, 2021. The BLRV is intended to identify children with higher levels of lead in their blood compared to most children, based on the 97.5th percentile of the blood lead level (BLL) distribution in U.S. children ages 1–5 years.

### ***Investing in behavioral health care***

- ✓ Released new [HHS Overdose Prevention Strategy](#) designed to increase access to the full range of care and services for individuals who use substances that cause overdose. This new strategy prioritizes four key target areas: primary prevention, harm reduction, evidence-based treatment, and recovery support.
- ✓ Established [Behavioral Health Coordinating Council](#) to facilitate collaborative, innovative, transparent, equitable, and action-oriented approaches to addressing the HHS' behavioral health agenda across all agencies under the HHS umbrella.



- ✓ Invested [nearly \\$300 million to help states prepare](#) for the launch of the **988 suicide prevention lifeline**, which is set to become operational in July 2022.
- ✓ Awarded [100 grants worth \\$250 million to increase access to certified community behavioral health centers](#) throughout the nation that provide community-based support for Americans in need of substance use disorder and mental health treatment services.
- ✓ Formed the [first-in-the-nation Recovery office](#) in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, to prioritize long term recovery.
- ✓ [Invested \\$3 billion in American Rescue Plan funding—the largest aggregate amount of funding to date](#) — into the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Program and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program. This followed the March announcement of supplemental funding of nearly \$2.5 billion for these programs.
- ✓ Released [new buprenorphine practice guidelines](#) that remove a longtime requirement tied to training, which some practitioners have cited as a barrier to treating more people.
- ✓ CMS [approved the California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal \(CalAIM\) program that advances treatment for individuals with substance use disorder](#), including evidence-based contingency management to reduce the use of stimulants, strengthens home and community-based services and will help address enrollees' health-related social needs.
- ✓ CDC [launched four complementary education campaigns](#) that provide information about the prevalence and dangers of fentanyl, the risks and consequences of mixing drugs, the life-saving power of naloxone, and the importance of reducing stigma around drug use to support treatment and recovery.
- ✓ National Institutes of Health [supported research to accelerate scientific solutions to the overdose crisis](#), including **research on prevention of substance use and use disorders**; novel treatment strategies for addiction and overdose reversal; interventions to reduce drug harms and infection transmission; models of recovery support; and implementation of evidence-based practices in healthcare, community and justice settings.
- ✓ The American Rescue Plan invested [nearly \\$4 billion](#) to expand access to vital mental health and substance use disorder services.
- ✓ Issued grants to [15 state Medicaid programs](#) to help them build a **mobile crisis benefit in Medicaid**.
- ✓ Issued comprehensive guidance [authorizing enhanced funding for community-based mobile crisis units](#) across all states in Medicaid.



- ✓ **Expanded Project AWARE** (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education), a program that helps build or expand state and local governments' coordination to increase awareness of mental health issues among school-aged youth.
- ✓ Funded **record-setting \$825 million to Community Mental Health Centers**.
- ✓ Allowed for **federal dollars to be used to purchase Fentanyl test strips** for the **first time in history**, providing federal support for a critical harm reduction strategy.

### ***Investing in Social Determinants of Health***

- ✓ HHS launched a **partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development** to coordinate resources and improve access to affordable housing and the supportive services that make community living possible for older adults, people with disabilities and people experiencing homelessness.

### **Fulfilling Legal Responsibility to Care for Unaccompanied Children**

- ✓ Provided **care and protection for unaccompanied children** across the country while they were in our custody.
- ✓ **Significantly increased care capacity** to ensure children can be safely and timely transferred out of Customs and Border Protection custody and placed into the custody of HHS or a vetted, responsible sponsor.

### **Restoring America's Role as a Global Leader**

- ✓ Restored U.S. role as global health leader at the World Health Assembly and G7 Health Ministers Meeting.
- ✓ Led a broad U.S. **delegation to the World Health Assembly**.
- ✓ Secretary **traveled to the U.K. to join other G7 health ministers** to recommit the U.S. to help **lead efforts to tackle global health challenges with multilateral action**.
- ✓ Co-led a coalition of health and finance ministers to determine **pandemic response planning** needs for the future.
- ✓ **Supported efforts to donate COVID-19 vaccine to countries in need** both directly and through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX).



- ✔ Provided **\$750 million through ARP funding for global health security**, global disease protection and response, and global health protection.
- ✔ HHS has been supporting the whole-of-government response for **Operation Allies Welcome** and is home to **several programs that support the new arrivals from Afghanistan** with a variety of assistance, including medical care, education and employment assistance, and support for housing and community integration.
- ✔ **Supported Afghan resettlement communities** across the country and bolstered programming to help foster self-sufficiency and live up to our humanitarian mission.
  - Today, there are **more than 260 unaccompanied Afghan minors in HHS's care**; **1,183 unaccompanied Afghan** minors have united with vetted sponsors.

