

Vice Chair Diana Harshbarger Opening Statement
Subcommittee on Health
The Fiscal Year 2027 Department of Health and Human Services Budget
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As prepared for delivery.

Today, we welcome Secretary Kennedy to discuss the President's Fiscal Year 2027 budget for the Department of Health and Human Services. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here and for your continued engagement with this Committee.

At the outset, I want to recognize the leadership of President Trump and your work at HHS to advance a bold vision for *Making America Healthy Again*. The mission of HHS—to promote and protect the health and well-being of Americans—has never been more important, especially as we confront rising chronic disease, increasing health care costs, and growing access challenges across the country.

As a pharmacist, I've seen firsthand how these challenges play out in real life—at the pharmacy counter, in rural communities, and for patients trying to navigate a system that is often too complicated and too expensive. Too often, patients walk away from needed care—not because it isn't available, but because they can't afford it, or because the system makes it too difficult to get the care they need.

That's why I appreciate the Administration's focus on prevention, transparency, and accountability—core principles that are reflected throughout this budget. Efforts to strengthen primary care, expand behavioral health services, and invest in maternal and child health are important steps toward improving outcomes and bending the cost curve over time.

A stronger emphasis on prevention—particularly addressing nutrition and chronic disease—has the potential to reduce long-term costs while improving quality of life for millions of Americans.

I am also encouraged by the emphasis on healthcare affordability. Families in East Tennessee and across the country continue to feel the strain of high drug prices, rising premiums, and out-of-pocket costs. The Administration’s work to increase price transparency and ensure patients have access to clear, usable pricing information is a critical step toward restoring a functioning health care marketplace.

Similarly, efforts to promote competition—through biosimilars and streamlined regulatory pathways—can help bring down costs and expand treatment options.

And modernizing tools like prior authorization to reduce delays and administrative burden is something both patients and providers have long needed.

Another area of strong interest for this Subcommittee—and certainly for my district—is rural health. We know that rural communities face unique challenges, including provider shortages, hospital closures, and limited access to specialty care. In many parts of East Tennessee, patients may travel long distances just to see a provider or fill a prescription.

I look forward to hearing more about how this budget supports rural providers, strengthens the healthcare workforce, and ensures that patients—regardless of where they live—can access timely, high-quality care. Investments in primary care, workforce development, and community-based services will be key to stabilizing rural health systems and improving outcomes.

I also want to commend the Department’s focus on program integrity and stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Efforts to combat fraud, waste, and abuse in

Medicare and Medicaid— and to move toward more real-time oversight—are essential to protecting these programs for the patients who depend on them.

Every dollar lost to fraud is a dollar that cannot be used for patient care, and strong oversight is critical to maintaining trust in our health care system.

Finally, I want to highlight the importance of ensuring patients have access to innovative treatments and therapies. The Administration's efforts to accelerate drug development, reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers, and support individualized therapies— particularly for rare diseases—are promising steps forward.

At the same time, we must ensure that these scientific advancements translate into real-world access—so patients can get the care they need, when they need it, without unnecessary delay.

Mr. Secretary, this budget outlines an ambitious agenda to improve health outcomes, modernize federal programs, and make health care more affordable and accessible. This Subcommittee looks forward to working with you to ensure these priorities are implemented in a way that delivers real results for the American people.

I appreciate your testimony and look forward to our discussion today.