

Trump Administration Seeks Fixes for Social Needs Harming Health

By Shira Stein | November 14, 2018 12:16PM ET

The Trump administration is preparing a new payment and service delivery model to address social needs, such as insufficient food or housing, that harm Americans' health, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said in a speech today.

The model would address housing and nutrition, Azar told a Hatch Foundation for Civility and Solutions gathering in Washington. It would also authorize organizations to use more unconventional solutions, such as paying for a beneficiary's rent if housing is unstable or making sure a diabetic had access to and could afford nutritious food.

The administration has been using alternative payment models, systems where providers earn rewards for delivering high quality and cost-efficient care in exchange for taking on risk, to promote payment based on patient outcomes instead of numbers of procedures.

Medicare Innovation Director Adam Boehler has [previously indicated](#) that the agency plans to work with the private sector and other agencies to address these social determinants of health. Boehler also said he had heard that some corporations are interested in spending money on community development to help fill unmet needs.

"I don't want to tie people's hands behind their back" to prevent them from investing, Boehler said at the Hatch Foundation event. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is looking at the appropriate waivers to allow private companies to make these investments, Boehler added.

This is the third new payment model [Azar has announced](#) since the midterm elections.

The Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Treasury, and Agriculture are interested in partnering with the CMS on addressing social determinants of health, Boehler said.

The administration is already running a model to help connect Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries with community-based services, such as health-care providers, colleges or universities, local or national nonprofits, or tribal organizations.

These organizations oversee the screening of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries for social and behavioral problems, such as housing instability, food insecurity, utility needs, interpersonal violence and transportation limitations, and help them connect with and navigate the appropriate community-based services.

The model was announced January 2016, during the Obama administration, and launched in April 2017 under the Trump administration.

To contact the reporter on this story: Shira Stein in Washington at sstein@bloomberglaw.com

To contact the editors responsible for this story: Paul Hendrie at phendrie@bgov.com; Robin Meszoly
at rmezoly@bgov.com