

Trump, Senate Priorities Aligned to Lower Health-Care Costs

By Shira Stein

Posted Dec. 12, 2018, 10:15 AM

- More drug pricing regulations, payment models
- Senate getting input on lowering health-care costs

The Trump administration is planning to release new efforts to lower health-care costs in the coming months at the same time the Senate is planning new legislation to do the same.

The Department of Health and Human Services is going to continue “attacking this very broken system of drug pricing” in the new year, and they still have a few items from the drug pricing blueprint left to accomplish, HHS Secretary Alex Azar said Dec. 12.

President Donald Trump is “fervently committed” to lowering drug prices, but that is not going to be accomplished by one simple solution, Azar said at a health-care event hosted by Axios.

Azar also said there is going to be a “lot of action in the next couple of months” on new and reworked payment and service delivery models from CMS’s Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation.

Move Away From Obamacare

The chairman of the Senate Health committee, Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) said he too plans on turning his focus to making big changes to lower health-care costs in 2019.

Alexander wants to move the debate in the Senate from a focus on health insurance and Obamacare to making the health-care system “a true market,” he said at the event.

Alexander sent a letter to health-care consultants at the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution for their input on how to lower costs, and he said he is looking for them to give him specific ideas in order of most importance.

“The best opportunity for success sometimes is with divided government,” Alexander said. He and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), ranking member on the HELP committee, are known for their bipartisan cooperation.

Alexander also wants to focus on price transparency for services, an effort the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has started to undergo with some of their recent regulations.

“If no one knows the price, prices aren’t going to come down,” Alexander said.

Members of Congress have started to push against a practice of expensive, unexpected doctor bills, known as surprise billing, and Alexander said he wants to address it in 2019, although he's not sure how yet.

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