

Becerra: Provider Relief Deadline Flexibility Is For New Disbursements

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HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra told senators Wednesday (June 9) the \$24 billion in remaining provider relief will not be subject to the June 30 spending deadline when it's distributed, but previous relief does have a deadline. While he's committed to accountability for those funds, Becerra again promised flexibility for relief recipients.

A day earlier, Becerra told the House Ways & Means Committee that [HHS would provide flexibility on the provider relief spending deadline](#), but he didn't distinguish between already distributed funding and funding yet to be disbursed.

"[T]here's a tranche of money that has not yet been allocated, and so, the deadline for spending of that has not yet been determined, but there is money that did go out; it does have a deadline," Becerra told the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on HHS. "And what we're trying to do is, over the next few weeks, make sure we provide some guidance so people understand how we can make sure that everyone fulfills their commitment to getting these dollars."

He later added, "And so what we'll try to do is understand that we can't change the process that began before but what we can try to do is make sure we get the accountability while trying to provide some flexibility."

The American Hospital Association, along with other medical organizations and a bipartisan group of 77 lawmakers, have been asking HHS for weeks [to extend the provider relief spending deadline](#) to the length of the public health emergency as providers say they have on-going COVID-19 costs.

Senate Appropriations subcommittee on HHS ranking Republican Roy Blunt (MO) told Becerra to be careful that new guidance doesn't unintentionally restrict how providers can spend relief.

Stakeholders have complained over confusing and constantly changing guidelines. Congress even had to step in at one point [to clarify how providers can calculate their lost revenue due to COVID-19](#).

"So I hope as you allocate this last group, this last amount of money or put out whatever guidance you need that it doesn't suddenly restrict what they were earlier told they could do, but more importantly, it does let them know that you're going to have guidelines out there that they can rely on if they spend the money that way that it meets the guidelines," Blunt said.

Becerra also explained, at Blunt's prompting, what past mistakes he wants to avoid with the next provider relief distribution.

There is an estimated \$24 billion left in unallocated provider relief, [though HHS has not said how much provider relief remains in each tranche](#). There hasn't been a new provider relief distribution announced since October.

"I think most people will tell you, at least the comments that we're receiving, are that there wasn't enough transparency in the process, how the money was allocated," Becerra said.

At the same time, Becerra added, HHS' provider relief distribution formula was unfair to those catering to mostly Medicaid and low-income patients as relief payments were calculated from providers' revenue. This meant providers accepting Medicare and private insurance typically received higher provider relief distributions.

"So we're trying to provide that transparency, make sure we direct them to where it's needed, and with the money that still left, we want to make sure that you all [Congress] look at this and say we get it," Becerra said. -- Dorothy Mills-Gregg (dmillsgregg@iwppnews.com)

