

## BACKGROUND

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provides critical investments that expand access to health care, advance health equity, help beat the pandemic, and put people across the nation on the path to recovery. This influx of federal funding provides essential resources to help individuals and families hardest hit by the pandemic recover and thrive. This money will be used to help our communities rebound in the short term, and makes an important investment in our public health infrastructure to [rebuild stronger than before](#).

Advocates will play an important role in promoting opportunities for expanded health coverage and ensuring robust participation and input from the community. We have a unique opportunity for power building: As we rebuild and recover from the ground up, we must continue to demand that resources and investments be directed to those most excluded from health and economic opportunities and create space for communities to build power and voice.

This toolkit offers resources and strategies for advocates to make consumers aware of the ARPA investments in affordable coverage and in the community infrastructure, and helps advocates leverage these opportunities to strengthen public health infrastructure and invest in our communities.

## WHAT DOES ARPA DO?

ARPA is comprehensive legislation that provides economic relief to people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating impact on the country. [Click here for a detailed list of these provisions, including specific funding opportunities](#). ARPA makes health coverage more affordable, available and equitable for people across the country during this critical time.

Below is a summary of key the healthcare provisions found in ARPA. It is important to note that some of these programs—such as the dramatic new cost reductions in the marketplace plans—will be available immediately to provide consumers relief. But other programs and decisions are held at the state and community level. As these programs come online, advocates will need to jump on the opportunities to ensure they are equitably administered and inclusive of all individuals and families who need services and care.

### **Makes marketplace coverage more affordable for many Americans.**

ARPA includes provisions to [eliminate or reduce premiums](#) for millions of Marketplace enrollees. For example, premiums are eliminated for those below 150% for certain marketplace plans, and premiums are lowered for everyone else currently eligible for premium tax credits. ARPA also extends eligibility for Marketplace subsidies to people with income over 400% FPL. ARPA provides for premium assistance of 100 percent for COBRA continuation coverage for eligible individuals and families. [Read more here](#).

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Advocates will play a key role in education and awareness-raising about the availability of health insurance. Getting people enrolled in coverage is critical and many will be enrolling in public coverage for the first time. In addition, there are opportunities to think more expansively about how community assistance is implemented and awarded to ensure that community-based organizations – particularly those who work in and with Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities and limited English proficiency (LEP) communities – receive adequate funding.

# The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: Opportunities for Advocates

## **Includes generous incentives for Medicaid expansion.**

ARPA provides temporary incentives to expand Medicaid and extend coverage, addressing coverage gaps and extending services to targeted populations. ARPA has the potential to bring billions of dollars to states to expand Medicaid, funding that will cover the entire cost of expansion and then some, so that states can fill budget holes left by the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. [Read more here.](#)

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Advocates in states that have not yet expanded Medicaid can continue to build momentum and pressure on state policymakers to expand coverage.

## **Allocates funding for community health workers and community-based care.**

ARPA provides enhanced 10 percent federal match funding for [Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services \(HCBS\)](#), which are crucial and lifesaving services for many seniors and people with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and increased the need for home-based care, as more than one-third of the nation's deaths from COVID-19 have been linked to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Additionally, most older adults would prefer to age in their home and community, and so increasing access to HCBS would go a long way towards making long-term care in Medicaid more-person centered. ARPA takes a significant step toward improving access to this critical benefit at a time when the populations it's intended to serve need it most.

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Advocates must be ready to support groups that represent seniors and people with disabilities for the ongoing implementation of a strong and high quality HCBS program.

## **Supports community health workers (CHWs).**

ARPA allocates funding for the recruitment, hiring, and training CHWs by public health departments. Specifically, ARPA includes \$7.6 billion to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to build out the public health workforce, by hiring community-based providers.

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Advocates should prepare to support the advancement of CHWs including making sure that state policymakers establish robust, inclusive guidelines for CHWs, that the services offered by CHWs are reimbursable and adequately paid, and that a full range of CHWs are able to participate in the new public health infrastructure.

## **Invests directly in expanded services for substance use and mental illness.**

ARPA includes funding to address substance use disorders, build the workforce, and address mental health and substance use concerns among health workers. ARPA – plus the December COVID package – will send more than \$3 billion to the states to address massive gaps in substance use prevention, treatment and recovery services. [Read more here.](#)

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Work with other advocates and stakeholders to highlight community needs and make a case for targeted funding to address those needs (e.g., support for recovery services delivered virtually). Identify the most pressing needs in their community and work with state policymakers to ensure funding is equitably and inclusively targeted.

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## Allows states to extend postpartum coverage under Medicaid and CHIP.

Every state now has the ability to extend Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months postpartum, thereby providing health coverage to low-income mothers during a time period when up to [one-third](#) of maternal deaths occur. [Read more here.](#)

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Advocates, working in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, should design and implement a strategy campaign to push their state to extend postpartum coverage.

## Provides robust funding to rebuild the public health infrastructure.

ARPA directs \$70 billion to carry out activities related to establishing, expanding, and sustaining a public health workforce. For one example, this workforce funding could support [dental therapists](#), innovative community-based providers specifically trained to extend routine care into chronic shortage areas. The consequences of dental disease are far-reaching, threatening our overall health, well-being and economic security. Access to dental care has proven that much more urgent amid the pandemic. Investing in a public health approach like dental therapy can help alleviate these access issues. [Read more here.](#)

- ➔ **Key Opportunity:** Get ready to work with policymakers and other decision makers (e.g., health boards) as this money flows through the state.

## STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

### Rebuild Stronger

The American Rescue Plan provides immediate relief to the American people and it is critically important to get the word out. It also provide a chance to reimagine and rebuild our public health infrastructure, prioritizing equity and sustainability. Over the next weeks and months, state policymakers will be grappling with how to and where to spend their ARPA funds.

It will be possible to leverage the implementation of these APRA programs in innovative ways that gets funding directly to community-based providers, schools, and health care systems that of underserve communities and to build agency and power in BIPOC communities by funding community-based organizations. Advocates should be prepared to influence state level decisions as they become available.

### Promote Access and Build Awareness

- [Focus on enrollment and public health opportunities:](#) Promote new opportunities that are coming online and, in doing so, work with a wide range of partners, stakeholders and policymakers to demonstrate why investments in health care and public health are so important.
- [Share consumer stories:](#) Regardless of the decision maker, [story collection](#) is an important tool for engaging stakeholders. Continue story collection as the law is implemented to show how ARPA improves lives and strengthens community.

# The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: Opportunities for Advocates

- Build power for future policymaking that is focused on racial equity and inclusion: Addressing racial equity in COVID-19 responses is essential to support communities that are marginalized in a variety of ways. In the face of such staggering inequities, state advocates must center racial equity in their COVID-19 advocacy. For example, do a community needs assessment to identify the most pressing needs in the community and where there are existing, community-based solutions that are already working. For suggestions on how to approach this work, check out these resources:
  - [Racial Equity in State and Local COVID-19 Responses Checklist](#)
  - [3 Principles for an Antiracist, Equitable State Response to COVID-19 — and a Stronger Recovery](#)
  - [Oral Health Policy Equity Tool](#)
- Seam together upcoming opportunities: For example, when talking about new investments in affordable health insurance through the marketplace with partners and stakeholders, also think about opportunities to expand Medicaid.
- Investigate how consumers will be involved in ARPA decisions: Reach out to key decision makers to understand how the state and localities will [engage communities](#) in determining use of ARPA funds – this could be a local public health board, a state representative and/or members of Congress. For example, the Massachusetts Office of Health and Human Services is soliciting feedback via a [Request for Information](#) to gather feedback and ideas from the community on how to best use the Home and Community-Based Services funding from the federal government.
- Demand creation of a local coordinating committee that has consumer representation to ensure community-based organizations central to the health and wellness of communities are part of rebuilding the public health infrastructure. Ryan White local planning councils serve as a great model for how to involve the community in decision making, read [here](#).

## Stakeholders & Partners

- State and local government: ARPA funding decisions are occurring at the state and local level. These government officials are particularly important stakeholders in determining if and how ARPA funds are spent in the community. [This report](#) provides a guide to talking to local leaders about ARPA. Specifically, how the funding can be used to stabilize, strategize, and organize and the ways advocates are getting a seat at the table
- Local coalitions: Existing coalitions with existing relationships with city and county decision-makers could be an important partner in directing funding and support to issues most pressing to their respective communities. Go beyond health: there probably are cross-sector tables thinking about how funds are used. Together, you can become a voice for a set of shared principles on how to spend money and a partner in decision making at the state and local level.
- COVID task force entities: Leverage existing bodies focused on COVID-19 and equity. A number of states developed task forces and launched community-level efforts to address racism as a public health issue over the past year. These groups are focused on the intersection of equity and COVID-19 and should inform decisions about ARPA.

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- **Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs):** States are increasingly looking to ACOs for innovative ways to improve health outcomes, control costs, and improve health care quality. ACOs may be an important stakeholder in your state for influencing ARPA funding.

## Federal Action

The current ARPA resources – and corresponding advocacy – are an opportunity to lay the groundwork for [federal action](#). It is a crucial time to establish regular communication with your members of Congress to share your priorities. You can invite members of Congress to data walks, town halls, listening sessions, etc. to hear from constituents. It's important for advocates to be the feedback loop: as states and localities allocate resources to communities, members of Congress need to know about it. This helps us all build the case for a [commitment to permanence](#).

## Communications

These sample communication materials should be helpful in talking about ARPA and building the narrative around the crucial need for investing in hardest hit communities. Adding stories from your community and/or include local data will be helpful in keeping the drumbeat going for further investments.

- **Talking points:** [Click here for topline talking points for ARPA](#) to guide you in talking about ARPA to policymakers, stakeholders and community members.
- **OpEd:** [Click here for an op-ed template](#), which state advocates and community-based organizations can use to put pressure on policymakers to include consumers and advocates in decisions about how recovery funds are spent.
- **Letter to Editor:** [Click here for a sample letter](#) to the editor to raise public awareness around the positive impact of the American Rescue Plan Act in your state. Use the letter to advocate publicly to involve community members in conversations about COVID-relief funding in the American Rescue Plan Act.
- **Editable twitter graphics:** Create and share [sample images](#) for the ARPA win, what it means for communities. Could use as a starting point to develop groups' own branded, in-language shareable images for Twitter or any social platform.
- **Reporter briefings:** Reach out to local reporters and offer to brief them on the streams of funding and how dollars could benefit the community if allocated as intended. Make the case for why local consumers and advocates need to provide input into decisions about how funds are spent. This American Rescue Plan Act information is a lot for reporters at already-stretched state and local news outlets to get their arms around. Assisting them will not only help to generate stories that call attention to the issue, it will also enable you to build valued relationships with reporters.

## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

- [American Rescue Plan Act: Health Coverage Provisions Explained](#)
- [Top Five Things to Ensure the Success of the American Rescue Plan Act](#)
- [Local Recovery: Five Principles for ARP Implementation](#)
- [How should local leaders use their American Rescue Plan funding?](#)
- [Center on Children and Families \(CCF\) and Community Catalyst ARPA Funding Webinar](#)

## MOVING FORWARD

Community Catalyst will continue to keep you informed about COVID-19 relief packages and accompanying funding/resources for communities. We hope to continue learning from advocates about how you are leveraging ARPA and other COVID-relief opportunities. Together, we need to alleviate the harm brought on by COVID-19 while rebuilding our public health infrastructure and investing in community power.