

# HEALTH

Health care was not a top priority during the 89th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. Unlike previous sessions—which delivered major investments in the state’s psychiatric hospital system, modest postpartum Medicaid expansion, and increased mental health funding following the Uvalde tragedy—this session saw relatively limited movement in this area. Lawmakers approved some notable bills and budget items, but many important bills that were priorities for Texas communities did not make it across the finish line.

Limited progress was made on ensuring Texans have access to affordable, quality health care. HB 321 by Rep. Bucy, which would have streamlined Medicaid and CHIP enrollment for eligible kids using existing data from programs like SNAP did not pass. However, the Legislature approved about \$800 million to modernize the state’s outdated eligibility system—TIERS—and increase staffing to speed up processing for Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP applications— helping families receive timely access to care and food assistance.

Hunger and food insecurity—key drivers of poor health—also saw little progress this session. The Governor vetoed a \$60 million budget rider that would have enabled Texas to implement the federal Summer EBT (Sun Bucks) program in 2027, a benefit already adopted by more than 30 states. In addition, lawmakers filed dozens of harmful bills to restrict SNAP access. A key advocacy win: United Ways of Texas helped narrow SB 379, which, as passed, only prohibits the use of SNAP benefits for sweetened beverages and candy—far less impactful than earlier proposals.

## Passed

### **Mental Health & Behavioral Health**

SB 5 by Sen. Huffman establishes the Dementia Prevention Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT) to advance research on dementia, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and related conditions.

SB 12 by Sen. Creighton expands requirements for obtaining parental consent before a student can receive psychological or psychiatric exams, testing, or treatment conducted by school district employees or contractors.

SB 646 by Sen. West expands student loan forgiveness for a broader range of licensed mental health professionals who work in underserved areas or with high-need populations.

SB 800 by Sen. Zaffirini requires postsecondary institutions to include a video in orientation programs that clearly highlights contact information, office locations, and services of Title IX coordinators.

## Passed

SB 897 by Sen. Blanco reduces the grant match requirement from 100% to 50% for mental health programs serving veterans and their families in large counties (over 250,000 residents), improving access to care.

SB 1401 by Sen. West establishes Texas Mental Health Profession Pipeline to increase the number of licensed mental health professionals by supporting students pursuing degrees in mental health fields.

SB 1563 by Sen. Menéndez requires the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement in partnership with the Texas Veterans Commission to develop training for county jailers on how to effectively interact with veterans in the criminal justice system.

SB 2308 by Sen. Parker establishes a state grant program to support FDA-approved clinical trials using ibogaine as a potential treatment for opioid use disorder, co-occurring substance use disorders, and other neurological or mental health conditions.

HB 18 by Rep. VanDeaver requires the Texas Child Mental Health Consortium to create the Rural Texas Pediatric Mental Health Access Program, aimed at supporting rural hospitals and clinics in providing behavioral health services for children and perinatal patients, improving access to specialized mental health care in rural communities.

HB 35 by Rep. Thompson establishes the Texas First Responder Peer Network to provide confidential mental health peer support for firefighters and EMS personnel, modeled after the existing network for law enforcement.

HB 37 by Rep. Plesa establishes a perinatal bereavement care initiative through the Texas Department of State Health Services to support families after stillbirth or neonatal loss.

HB 114 by Rep. Cortez transfers the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program that provides mental health services for veterans and their families to the Texas Veterans Commission.

HB 2809 by Rep. Rose requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to report suicide attempts by children in its managing conservatorship in its annual public report and to notify a child's parent within a set timeframe following an attempt.

HB 3062 by Rep. Guerra requires public colleges and universities to provide education on drug poisoning, fentanyl prevention, suicide prevention, and substance use to all first-semester undergraduate students, ensuring they receive critical health and safety information early in their college experience.

# Passed

HB 5342 by Rep. Oliverson establishes a trust fund to support the sustainability of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in Texas and to support mobile crisis outreach teams across the state.

## **Health Coverage & Access to Services**

SB 896 by Sen. Blanco extends the enrollment period for newborns in parents' health insurance plans from 31 to 60 days, giving new parents more time to complete coverage for their child. SB 1409 by Sen. Parker allows public universities to offer "higher education health benefits" – student health plans that are exempt from traditional state insurance regulations and similar to the Farm Bureau plans and Texas mutual plans approved previously by the Legislature.

HB 18 by Rep. VanDeaver establishes a rural hospital grant program to support workforce recruitment and retention—especially OB-GYNs, emergency physicians, and nurses—and to improve maternal health access through expanded services, telehealth, and critical care transport.

HB 541 by Rep. Shaheen clarifies and expands the legal framework for direct patient care arrangements between patients and healthcare professionals in Texas.

HB 1052 by Rep. Bhojani requires insurers to cover telehealth services delivered from out-of-state if the patient lives in Texas and the provider holds a Texas license.

HB 1965 by Rep. Garcia, J. requires the Texas Veterans Commission, in collaboration with the Health and Human Services Commission, to study ways to improve access to mental health services through the Military Veteran Peer Network.

HB 3000 by Rep. King creates the Rural Ambulance Service Grant Program to help fund ambulance purchases in rural counties with fewer than 68,750 residents. Eligible counties can receive up to \$500,000 based on need, distance to trauma centers, and local financial capacity

HB 3800 by Rep. Orr requires HHSC to establish a local health workforce advisory board to develop a resource guide that strengthens collaboration between health care providers and higher education institutions to address health care workforce shortages.

HB 3801 by Rep. Orr establishes the Health Professions Workforce Coordinating Council and a workgroup on nursing career pathways.

HB 4224 by Rep. Hull requires healthcare providers to clearly post instructions—both online and onsite—on how patients can request medical records and file complaints.

# Passed

## **Maternal & Child Health and Healthy Families**

SB 1388 by Sen. Kolkhorst clarifies that private medical or mental health care providers, government, and quasi-government entities are not eligible to receive Thriving Texas Families funds.

SB 1946 by Sen. Zaffirini creates a family violence criminal homicide prevention task force.

HB 26 by Rep. Hull allows Medicaid MCOs to offer nutrition counseling and instruction as an “in lieu of service” (ILOS) benefit and establishes a pilot program allowing Medicaid to cover medically tailored meals for pregnant women to support healthier pregnancies.

HB 136 by Rep. Hull expands Medicaid benefits to include lactation support services for new mothers.

HB 713 by Rep. Howard improves efficiency in maternal health oversight by streamlining how the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee accesses and reviews death data.

HB 3284 by Rep. Frank creates the Texas Commission on Marriage and Family to review laws, policies, and state programs affecting marriage and family formation, and to make recommendations to the legislature based on its findings.

HB 3940 by Rep. Johnson enhances newborn health coverage by requiring HHSC to annually remind healthcare providers and Medicaid plans that a mother’s Medicaid ID may be used for newborn care reimbursement if the baby hasn’t been assigned an ID.

HB 5155 by Rep. Rose extends the Medicaid Maternal Opioid Misuse (MOM) model, which improves care access and quality for pregnant women with opioid use disorder.

## **Other Health Bills:**

SB 10 by Sen. Paxton authorizes the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) to establish an anti-human trafficking unit, identify businesses affected by trafficking, and coordinate efforts with law enforcement, the attorney general, and community partners.

SB 25 by Sen. Kolkhorst establishes new food product labeling requirements and mandates continuing education on nutrition and metabolic health for licensed physicians, physician assistants, nurses, and dietitians. It also requires these healthcare professionals to provide dietary counseling to patients based on advisory committee guidelines.

SB 916 by Sen. Zaffirini extends ban on ambulance surprise bills.

## Passed

HB 39 by Rep. Ray Lopez requires the Texas Department of State Health Services to share de-identified suicide and homicide data on veterans with the Texas Veterans Commission for annual report to guide prevention efforts.

HB 107 by Rep. Simmons creates a statewide sickle cell disease registry at the Texas Department of State Health Services to improve tracking, treatment, and research of the disease.

HB 216 by Rep. Harris enhances transparency and patient rights in medical billing. It requires healthcare providers to give patients a written, itemized bill detailing specific charges whenever payment is requested after services or supplies are delivered.

HB 451 by Rep. Thompson expands the utilization of screening for risks or signs of commercial sexual exploitation to all children who are in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or under the jurisdiction of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD).

HB 742 by Rep. Thompson requires first responders and certain healthcare workers to complete approved human trafficking prevention training. It directs HHSC to maintain a list of approved courses and mandates hospitals and emergency facilities to display training notices and protect employees who report suspected trafficking in good faith.

HB 754 by Rep. Thompson requires medical assistants to complete approved training on identifying and reporting human trafficking. It also mandates healthcare facilities to post signage with trafficking information and prohibits retaliation against employees who report suspected trafficking in good faith.

HB 1314 by Rep. Hickland requires healthcare facilities to provide patients with a written estimate for elective procedures within five business days of a request. If final charges exceed the estimate by \$400 or more, the facility must include instructions on how to dispute the bill. Noncompliant facilities cannot pursue collections or report the debt to credit agencies.

HB 1894 by Rep. Metcalf designates November as Veterans Month in the state of Texas.

HB 3376 by Rep. Capriglione requires an annual one-hour training for certain guardians on aging, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and related disorders. The requirement applies if the person under guardianship is 60 or older, or if they are under 60 and diagnosed with Alzheimer's, dementia, or a related condition.

# Passed

**Key Budget Items for Health Coverage & Access to Care:** \$139 million to upgrade the state's aging eligibility system—Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS); \$2.4 billion to increase base wage for personal care attendants to \$13/hr.; \$40 million for the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Incubator Program that helps nonprofits expand access to comprehensive care for uninsured and underserved Texans

**Key Budget Items for Mental & Behavioral Health:** \$10.41 billion for behavioral health funding across various state agencies and an additional \$214.9 million for specific mental health projects included in the supplemental budget (HB 500); \$55 million for the Community Mental Health Grant Program; \$5 million increase for the Healthy Community Collaboratives program to provide services to persons experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, or mental illness; \$40 million increase for Youth Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams; \$3 billion for the Dementia Prevention Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT), subject to voter approval; \$28 million for the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals; and \$5 million for the Behavioral Health Innovation Grant Program

**Key Budget Items for Maternal & Child Health:** Funding maintained for Healthy Texas Women, Family Planning Program, and Breast and Cervical Cancer Services totaling \$460 million over the biennium and includes \$20 million for Women's Preventative Mobile Health Units (MHUs) to reach underserved and unserved rural communities; \$5 million in GR for grants supporting maternal health programs to reduce obstetric complications and boost participation; \$5.6 million in GR to support improvements to the state's Maternal Mortality Review System and the Maternal and Child Health Quality Improvement System; \$6 million to support the SNAP Double-Up Bucks program;

**Key Budget Items for Prevention & Early Intervention, Healthy Families, Child Welfare, and more:** \$18 million increase for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services; level funding for Family Support Services; \$60 million in new funding for Thriving Texas Families; \$1 million increase for Fatherhood EFFECT; and \$1million increase for Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF)