



House Budget and Research Office

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2025 SESSION: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

The agencies within the health and human services budget area provide essential services for Georgia's most vulnerable citizens and families, including children, the elderly, and low-income individuals. These agencies and services account for 23% of the FY 2026 state budget or \$7.7 billion. The General Assembly continues to support and invest in these areas of the budget by providing an infusion of funds for mental health services, rate increases for health and human service providers, access to health care, and maternal and infant health.

Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)

- HB 68, the FY 2026 budget, provides \$5.8 million to DBHDD to expand the availability of forensic services and adds \$100,000 for a jail diversion program.
- The General Assembly provides \$3.4 million to add 150 new NOW/COMP waivers and \$9.4 million for a new behavioral health crisis center in North Fulton.
- The department receives \$1.3 million to expand alcohol use disorder peer support in emergency departments.
- [HB 584](#) (Rep. Jesse Petrea, 166th) reassigns licensing and oversight of drug abuse treatment and education programs, narcotic treatment programs, community living arrangements, and adult residential mental health programs from the Department of Community Health (DCH) to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). Community service boards will be the governing bodies.
- [SB 233](#) (Sen. Matt Brass, 6th) increases the number of members of the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission from 24 to 30. The bill also replaces the Involuntary Commitment and Workforce and System Development subcommittees of the commission with Addictive Diseases and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The commission's abolishment date is extended from June 30, 2025 to December 31, 2026.

Department of Human Services (DHS)

- HB 68 provides \$1 million to fund 400 new non-Medicaid home and community-based slots, which provide critical services such as meals, respite, and home care to keep older adults in their homes.
- The Senate agrees with the House to provide \$19.2 million to address growth in foster care and the increased costs of care; \$1 million to provide clothing and supplies for foster youth, keep foster children closer to their families, and deter child welfare involvement; and \$6.1 million for a 2% provider rate increase for Child Caring Institutions, Child Placing Agencies, foster parents, and relative caregivers.
- [HR 611](#) (Rep. Katie Dempsey, 13th) creates the House Study Committee on Abandoned Child Placement Following Hospital Discharge, which will study the abandonment of children after

psychiatric hospitalization and other types of out-of-home care. The committee will be comprised of five members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House.

- [SB 110](#) (Sen. Jason Anavitate, 31st) defines the term "blatant disregard" within the Juvenile Code as a real, significant, and imminent risk of harm that is so obvious to a legal custodian that a reasonable person would not expose a child to that imminent risk of harm without exercising certain precautionary measures. It also defines the term "independent activity" to be one that is not under the direct supervision of a legal custodian or parent and includes playing outdoors, walking to school, running errands, and traveling to local commercial or recreational facilities.

The bill modifies the definition of "neglect" to be when someone fails to provide necessary parental care, rather than proper parental care. It also narrows the requirements of when a parent must provide certain supervision necessary for the health and safety of a child to require the parent to avoid creating a real, significant, and imminent risk of harm to the child as a result of blatant disregard for the parent's responsibilities. This further narrows what constitutes abandonment of a child under the definition of "neglect" to exclude when a parent or guardian permits a child to engage in independent activities that reasonably avoid substantial risk of harm.

The bill also modifies O.C.G.A. 16-5-60 to amend the crime of when a person causes bodily harm to or endangers the bodily safety of another through conscious disregard of another's safety to explicitly not include when a parent or legal custodian permits a child to engage in one or more independent activities unless doing so constitutes neglect.

- [SB 259](#) (Sen. Matt Brass, 6th) is 'Ridge's Law,' and it requires a physician holding a child in temporary protective custody to make reasonable efforts to inform the child's parents of their right to obtain an independent medical evaluation or pediatric specialty consultation. The bill also requires the physician to inform the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) of the basis of their determinations regarding suspected abuse or neglect and whether a physical examination was conducted and what medical records were reviewed.

The bill defines pediatric specialty consultation as a consultation with a physician with specific experience in the listed fields. A parent of a child who is taken into temporary protective custody has the right to obtain an independent medical evaluation of the child at their own expense unless prohibited by court order. If an independent evaluation is obtained, the court will consider the results in any dependency proceeding that occurs due to alleged abuse. No hearing can be continued solely because the results from the independent evaluation are unavailable.

Medicaid

- HB 67, the Amended FY 2025 budget, provides \$550,000 for a pilot program to utilize predictive modeling to detect potential fraud, waste, and abuse with the state's Medicaid program and \$2.8 million to provide quality incentive payments to skilled nursing facilities.
- HB 68 includes \$16.9 million in reimbursement rate increases for providers treating patients on Medicaid across the state. The services include: \$4.9 million for emergency medical services (EMS) transports to provide payment for the first 10 miles of transportation and air ambulance transfers; \$701,766 for neonatologists and maternal fetal medicine specialists; \$5.4 million for applied behavior analysis; \$3.7 million for primary care physicians; \$1.5 million for dental code increases; and \$500,000 for privately-owned intermediate care facilities treating individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- The FY 2026 budget includes \$3.9 million to expand the newborn add-on payment for delivery services in rural Georgia. These funds will assist in the provision of the necessary infrastructure in order to provide high quality labor and delivery care.

- [HB 352](#) (Rep. Devan Seabaugh, 34th) is the 'Georgia Gestational Diabetes Management Act,' which includes patients with gestational diabetes on the list of those eligible for Medicaid covered continuous glucose monitors.

Department of Public Health (DPH)

- Within the Department of Public Health, the General Assembly includes \$500,000 in the Amended FY 2025 budget for an educational and awareness campaign on the signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer and a campaign to educate Georgians on the adverse effects of vaping. An additional \$270,000 is budgeted to study the impacts of social media on the mental health of Georgia's children.
- The General Assembly agrees with the governor's recommendation of \$2.9 million in the FY 2026 budget to expand the state's home visiting program from 50 to 75 counties throughout the state to improve birth outcomes, reduce preterm deliveries, and decrease infant and maternal mortality.
- \$600,000 is included in HB 68 to support quality improvement at birthing facilities by increasing the number of birthing facilities with verified maternal and neonatal levels of care, with an additional \$1.3 million included to increase funds for six perinatal regional centers to provide for surveillance, training, and monitoring of high-risk infants and increase access to maternal fetal medicine.
- The General Assembly include instructions in HB 68 for the Department of Public Health to study the needs of regional emergency transportation in order to evaluate more efficient ways to transport mothers needing additional care.
- [HB 89](#) (Rep. Sharon Cooper, 45th) authorizes the release of psychiatric records of a deceased person who is the subject of a maternal death review to the Maternal Mortality Review Committee. The bill also creates the Regional Perinatal Center Advisory Committee that will advise on the adequacy of regional perinatal centers in the state. The adequacy assessment will consider various factors such as patient safety, interfacility coordination, evaluation of high-risk pregnancies and deliveries, and transportation adequacy.
- [HR 304](#) (Rep. Michelle Au, 50th) creates the House Study Committee on the Costs and Effects of Smoking. The study committee will consist of five members of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the speaker of the House.
- [HR 847](#) (Rep. Darlene Taylor, 173rd) creates the House Study Committee on Evaluating Funding for Public Health. The committee will be comprised of five members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House.

Insurance

- HB 68 includes \$3.1 million to continue the \$3 dispensing fee for independent pharmacists for an additional six months, and an additional \$5 million for drugs dispensed to a covered person in an amount equal to the national average drug acquisition cost.
- [HB 94](#) (Rep. Eddie Lumsden, 12th) requires every health benefit policy renewed or issued after January 1, 2026 to include coverage for expenses related to starting fertility preservation when a medically necessary treatment may cause infertility.
- [HB 196](#) (Rep. Trey Kelley, 16th) requires health insurers to reimburse a pharmacy for a drug dispensed to a covered person on the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) based on the national average drug acquisition cost (NADAC). Additionally, the bill requires a professional dispensing fee that is not less than the professional dispensing fee paid by the state under the Social Security Act.
- [HB 422](#) (Rep. Derrick McCollum, 30th) requires the state employees' health insurance plan (SHBP) to include at least two high deductible health plans. The bill allows enrolled employees to make

pretax contributions to their health savings accounts. Government entities outside the scope of this bill are encouraged to offer similar pretax contribution options for their employees.

- [SB 5](#) (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick, 32nd) requires health insurers to implement a program that reduces prior authorization requirements for providers based on quality metrics.

The bill also requires that all health benefit policies administered by the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) in Georgia provide coverage for healthcare services related to Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS) and Pediatric Acute Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS). Coverage must align with nationally recognized clinical practice guidelines and apply to diagnosis, treatment, management, and monitoring of these conditions. The bill prohibits special deductibles, coinsurance, or copayments beyond those generally applicable to other covered healthcare services.

- [SB 101](#) (Sen. Randy Robertson, 29th) requires all benefits policies renewed on or after January 1, 2026 to include coverage for orthotic and prosthetic devices that are medically necessary for the following: activities of daily living, essential job-related activities, personal hygiene-related activities, and physical activities. Coverage will be provided for no more than three orthotic devices or prosthetic devices per affected limb per covered person during any three-year period.
- [SB 109](#) (Sen. Ed Harbison, 15th) prohibits group life insurance policies in Georgia from excluding or restricting liability for the death of an insured individual who is an active-duty service member, unless the death is directly or indirectly caused by war or a related act or hazard.
- [SB 121](#) (Sen. Marty Harbin, 16th) requires individuals convicted of driving under the influence in Georgia to obtain higher minimum motor vehicle liability insurance coverage. Enhanced insurance coverage must be maintained uninterrupted for three years in order to requalify for a standard rate.

Additional Health Highlights

- The General Assembly recommends providing over \$58 million in the Amended FY 2025 budget to the Georgia Technology Authority to support an IT modernization project with the Department of Human Services as well as funding for the Department of Community Health's Integrated Eligibility System.
- The FY 2026 budget provides \$7.4 million in new funding for graduate medical education. This includes \$3 million for 150 new residency slots, \$469,654 in new fellowships, and \$4 million to establish a grant program to support new and expanding residency programs.
- In an effort to support Georgia's health care workers, the General Assembly provides \$1 million to physician health programs to address career fatigue and wellness.
- In the Board of Dentistry, the FY 2026 budget contains \$327,690 for two new positions aimed to help the investigations and compliance responsibilities of the board, the purchase of appropriate protective equipment, increased retention, and funds for software and training. The FY 2026 budget contains \$161,560 in funding for the Board of Pharmacy for two new positions to alleviate caseload backlogs.
- [HB 197](#) (Rep. Lee Hawkins, 27th) implements a callback telecommunications system for peer-to-peer communications in the event a clinical peer is not available upon first contact effort. Additionally, this bill addresses prior authorization practices.
- [HB 322](#) (Rep. Lee Hawkins, 27th) creates additional provisions for dental school teaching applicants to accomplish before submitting a teaching application to the Georgia Board of Dentistry.
- [HB 428](#) (Rep. Lehman Franklin, 160th) clarifies that an individual will not be prohibited or prevented from obtaining in vitro fertilization.

- [HB 473](#) (Rep. Ron Stephens, 164th) adds certain drugs to the Code sections defining Schedule I controlled substances and defines dangerous drugs.
- [HB 567](#) (Rep. Katie Dempsey, 13th) authorizes teledentistry by licensed dentists, while establishing requirements and restrictions. The bill allows for the coverage of teledentistry healthcare services under dental benefits plans.
- [HB 645](#) (Rep. John LaHood, 175th) removes the COVID-19 testing requirement for new residents and staff in long-term care facilities. The bill also lowers the age at which a patient shall be offered a vaccination for the influenza virus at hospital discharge from 50 to 18 years old.
- [HR 69](#) (Rep. Imani Barnes, 86th) creates Biomedical Research Day, which will take place every third Thursday in April.
- [HR 72](#) (Rep. Lee Hawkins, 27th) creates the House Study Committee on Cancer Care Access. The committee is to be comprised of 12 committee members appointed by the speaker of the House.
- [SB 6](#) (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick, 32nd) allows for drug analysis equipment to be used to determine whether a controlled substance or its packaging has been altered.
- [SB 58](#) (Sen. John Albers, 56th) known as the 'Georgia Transporting Life-Saving Organs and Personnel Act,' authorizes the emergency transportation of necessary personnel, organs, tissue, or medical supplies to a time-critical organ transplant procedure.
- [SB 72](#) (Sen. Matt Brass, 6th) allows for a terminally ill patient's right to try investigational drugs, biological products, and devices to expand their access to individualized treatments.
- [SB 130](#) (Sen. Mike Hodges, 3rd) expands the ability for a resident or fellow to be taught in a teaching hospital or a medical facility that meets the stated criteria. This bill also allows a resident or fellow to apply for the service cancelable loan program through the Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce.
- [SB 140](#) (Sen. Greg Dolezal, 27th) authorizes a doctor of optometry to dispense and sell pharmaceuticals that are related to the treatment of diseases and conditions of the eye, except those that are controlled substances.
- [SB 185](#) (Sen. Randy Robertson, 29th) prohibits the use of state funds or resources for sex reassignment surgeries, hormone replacement therapies, or sex characteristic altering cosmetic procedures or prosthetics for state inmates. Exceptions may be considered for medically necessary treatments when the condition is not related to sex reassignment or gender dysphoria, treatment for those with a sex development disorder, treatment for partial androgen insensitivity syndrome, and hormone replacement therapy for those receiving such treatment prior to the effective date of the bill for the purpose of transitioning off of treatment.