



Affordability topped the list of challenges facing state policymakers during the 2026 legislative session. As people and families across the country continue to struggle with [rising health care costs](#), state legislators increasingly focused on policy solutions to address high prices charged by hospitals and other underlying drivers of health care spending while also protecting access to care in a challenging budget environment and uncertain federal health policy landscape.

State Policy Trends and Solutions

Despite a shortened legislative session for many lawmakers, states advanced bipartisan solutions aimed at making health care more affordable, dependable, and sustainable for people. Our [2026 state legislative trends report](#) identified four major state policy trends across states that drove this year's health care agenda:

1 States Took Action to Lower High Prices Charged by Hospitals by:

- **Advancing reference-based pricing** policies to limit or cap what hospitals can charge people for services.
- **Establishing limits on facility fees** to address loopholes in hospital billing practices and save people money.
- **Advancing site-neutral payment policy** to lower costs for routine services.
- **Expanding hospital price transparency requirements** to give people and policymakers greater insight into what hospitals are charging for care they provide.
- **Expanding consumer medical debt protections** to protect people from medical debt and aggressive debt collection.

2 States Supported Policies to Limit Harmful Health Care Consolidation and Corporatization of Health Care by:

- **Increasing oversight and review of health care transactions** to protect people from harmful health care mergers and acquisitions.
- **Pushing back against the corporatization of health care** by prohibiting non-clinician entities from driving medical decisionmaking.
- **Expanding health care ownership transparency requirements** to understand who actually owns and controls health care entities and allow policymakers to utilize those insights to inform policymaking.

3 States Pursued Legislation to Improve People's Access to Care by:

- **Increasing investment in primary care** to improve patient outcomes and lower overall costs.
- **Restricting the use of harmful prior authorization** to ensure people have access to timely, needed care.
- **Protecting people's access to no-cost preventive care**, which is particularly relevant in light of federal uncertainty.

4 States Responded to Federal Health Care Policy Changes by:

- **Expanding and protecting health care coverage expansions** in the wake of federal health care cuts.
- **Supporting rural health care** through the Rural Health Transformation Program.
- **Promoting patient-first care** through innovative solutions like the AHEAD Model.

Looking Ahead to 2027

While most legislatures have adjourned for the year ahead of the 2026 elections, policymakers are already thinking about next year's legislative agendas and the need to address health care affordability. As families are forced to consider tradeoffs between essentials like housing, food, and childcare and needed medical care, legislators are likely to continue their focus on solutions to address high prices charged by hospitals and combat increasing health care consolidation and corporatization. While states will continue to face challenges from the federal government and their own tight budgets, there will be plenty of opportunities for bipartisan action on the state level to move closer toward a more affordable health care system that works for all people.