The U.S. health care system.

A closer look at some of the health care highlights and landmark legislation that shaped the U.S. health care system.

FROM FORMATION TO REFORM: The construction of the U.S. health care system.

1751: Pennsylvania Hospital is founded by Thomas Bond and Benjamin Franklin, and in 1753 the first patients are admitted.

1800s: Hospitals are mainly reserved for individuals receiving charitable care, and those who can afford to receive care in their homes.

1849: New York becomes the first state to pass a law requiring health insurance companies to file incorporation papers with the Secretary of State.

1873: Three nurse educational programs begin operations in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—there are more than 2,800 registered nurses practicing in the U.S.

1887: Julius Peters invents the Peters cyanometer, changing the way blood is studied.

1908: Congress passes The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Congress amends the tax code to exclude employer contributions for their employees’ health insurance coverage—a tax which was valued at nearly $250 billion in 2013.

1954: Congress amends the Kefauver-Harris Amendments to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, requiring health insurance companies to file rough draft of the human genome to the public.


1960: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 54 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 10 million (from 42 million in 2014).22,23

1962: President John F. Kennedy signs the Medicare and Medicaid separate from the Social Security Administration.

1965: President Richard M. Nixon signs the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) Assistance Act of 1973, authorizing $375 million over five years to encourage the development of HMOs and requiring most employers with more than 25 employees to offer HMO plans if they were available.

1966: President Ronald Reagan passes the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA), requiring Medicare-participating hospitals to treat emergency medical conditions, and stabilization anyone who enters the emergency room.

1972: Dr. Jonas Salk tests a new polio vaccine on volunteers with successful outcomes.


1977: Medicare and Medicaid separately from the Social Security Administration.

1985: The Health Care Financing Administration, the precursor to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), is created to manage Medicare and Medicaid separately from the Social Security Administration.

1996: Congress passes the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), requiring most group health plans to continue health insurance for workers to work under certain conditions.

1998: Congress passes the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), most well-known for its efforts to increase privacy around health care information.


2003: 1.4 million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed, up from less than 500,000 in 1980.21

2010: More than 85% of hospitals have adopted federally certified electronic health record systems.

2012: Congress passes Pass the Pure Food and Drug Act. This gave the government authority to monitor the purity of foods and the safety of medicines, which is now a responsibility of the FDA.

2014: The National Convention of Insurance Commissioners develops the first model of state law for regulating health insurance.

2015: Congress passes the Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), requiring health insurance companies to treat and stabilize anyone who enters the emergency department regardless of ability to pay.

2016: The Human Genome Project releases its first rough draft of the human genome to the public.

2017: President Donald Trump signs into law the American Health Care Act of 2017, repealing the Affordable Care Act.

2018: President Donald Trump signs into law the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which is now a responsibility of the IRS.

2019: President Donald Trump signs into law the Medicare for All Act, establishing a national program of health insurance coverage.

2020: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 60 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 40 million (from 37 million in 2014).22,23

2021: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 65 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 45 million (from 37 million in 2014).22,23

2022: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 70 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 50 million (from 37 million in 2014).22,23

2023: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 75 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 55 million (from 37 million in 2014).22,23

2024: The U.S. population is expected to have more than 80 million older adults, and the number of uninsured is projected to reach more than 60 million (from 37 million in 2014).22,23