



Trump Nominates Dr. Oz to Lead CMS

On Tuesday, President-elect Donald Trump tapped Mehmet Oz, the celebrity physician and former Senate candidate, to head the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

The Trump-Vance transition team praised Oz as the most “qualified and capable physician” to “Make America Healthy Again.”

The statement reads, “Dr. Oz will work closely with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to take on the illness industrial complex, and all the horrible chronic diseases left in its wake.”



AP Images
Mehmet Oz

According to the statement, the new CMS administrator will be focusing on two areas. The first is to “incentiviz[e] Disease Prevention” in order to “get the best results in the World for every dollar we spend on Healthcare in our Great Country.” The second goal is to “cut waste and fraud” within America’s “most expansive government agency,” which consumes a quarter of the entire federal budget.

Accusations of fraud and waste in the CMS likely stem from concerns about improper payments, overbilling, and inefficiencies within programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. These allegations have been raised for decades, driven by audits, investigations, and watchdog reports.

From TV Personality to Healthcare Administrator

Dr. Mehmet Oz, 64, gained national recognition as the host of [The Dr. Oz Show](#), combining mainstream medical advice with more holistic health recommendations as well as “unapproved” treatments. For example, during the Covid pandemic, Dr. Oz emerged as an influential figure, frequently appearing on *Fox News* and promoting the use of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for Covid. That stance resonated with the position of then-president Trump, prompting Oz to reportedly become an [informal advisor](#) to the Trump administration during that period.

Oz ventured into politics in 2022 with an unsuccessful Senate bid in Pennsylvania, during which he championed a “Medicare Advantage for All” plan, expanding the privatized version of Medicare.

Advantage for All?

As a senatorial candidate, Dr. Oz proposed a bold overhaul of the U.S. healthcare system through his “Medicare Advantage for All” plan, which aimed to replace “traditional” Medicare with privatized plans under the Medicare Advantage framework. Oz advocated for universal enrollment in these plans, which are managed by private insurers but funded by the government.

To finance the initiative, then-candidate Oz suggested a 20-percent payroll tax. He argued this approach would reduce administrative costs, improve coverage, and offer a more efficient healthcare system.



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on November 20, 2024

As reported by [The Lever](#) at the time, critics said the plan could drive up overall costs, citing studies showing Medicare Advantage already costed more per enrollee than government-run Medicare. Additionally, government reports revealed that Medicare Advantage plans have a history of denying necessary care and raising premiums. Finally, the proposed payroll tax was slammed for its potential to “hit workers much harder than the Medicare for All plan proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders” and impacting low- and middle-income workers while sparing the wealthy.

Oz’s [reported financial ties](#) to major insurers such as UnitedHealth Group and Aetna, both of which profit heavily from Medicare Advantage, have drawn further scrutiny. While the plan positioned itself as a market-driven alternative to single-payer systems, opponents question its affordability and implications for seniors.

Oz and Big Pharma

Dr. Mehmet Oz’s ties to the pharmaceutical industry have sparked further concerns about potential conflicts of interest as he prepares to take on the role of CMS administrator.

[Financial disclosures](#) from his 2022 Senate campaign revealed significant investments in companies such as [Thermo Fisher Scientific](#) and [McKesson Corporation](#), a major pharmaceutical distributor, with holdings valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In addition to his investments, Oz has longstanding ties to the pharmaceutical sector through his media ventures and nonprofit organizations. His website previously [listed companies](#) such as Aventis (now Sanofi), Bayer, and Novartis as corporate partners. There’s a substantial risk these connections could influence his decisions at CMS, particularly in areas such as drug-price negotiations and Medicare reimbursement policies, where Big Pharma has significant financial stakes.

Mixed Reactions

Oz’s nomination has garnered both support and criticism from various quarters.

RFK, Jr., [tapped](#) to lead the Health and Human Services (HHS) last week, expressed his “excitement” about the “outstanding” nomination.

Senator Bill Cassidy (R-La.), the incoming chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP), welcomed the nomination, noting that it would be a “great opportunity to help patients and implement conservative health reforms.”

Additionally, Mary Beth Donahue, president of the Better Medicare Alliance, an advocacy group supported by insurers, [stated](#), “Dr. Oz recognizes the value of Medicare Advantage and the high-quality, affordable, and comprehensive health care it provides to more than 34 million seniors and individuals with disabilities.”

The more skeptical wing of the conservative front recalled Oz’s promotion of Covid vaccines and boosters.

Previously, Dr. Oz also advocated for China-style Covid lockdowns.



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Others pointed to Oz's support of the red-flag laws, legislation that allows law enforcement, family members, or other individuals to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from a person deemed to pose a significant risk to themselves or others.

An additional point of discontent was related to Oz's past endorsement of transgender surgeries for children.

The Republican Healthcare Evolution

Oz's nomination is emblematic of the Republican Party's shifting stance on Medicare and Medicaid. Historically, Republicans denounced the programs, which [were introduced](#) in the 1960s under President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" initiative. Many conservatives initially viewed Medicare and Medicaid as costly expansions of government. At the time, they criticized Medicare as a step toward "[socialized medicine](#)." Ronald Reagan warned it could mean "spending our sunset years telling our children ... what it once was like in America when men were free."

At the same time, critics such as Dr. Edward R. Annis of the American Medical Association (AMA) [predicted](#) the programs would "lower the quality and availability" of healthcare nationwide.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, Republican strategies shifted toward reforming these programs rather than opposing them outright. Key moments include the introduction of [Medicare Advantage](#) in 2003 under President George W. Bush, offering seniors privatized alternatives to government-run Medicare. Bush also signed the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization [Act](#), which added prescription drug benefits (Part D) and embraced private insurers as partners in an ostensible attempt to reducing costs.

In recent years, Republicans have leaned further into privatization and cost-containment measures. Proposals to introduce Medicaid work requirements and block grants to states reflect an emphasis on fiscal responsibility and local control. The first Trump administration amplified these efforts, advocating for Medicaid flexibility at the state level and defending Medicare Advantage against regulatory changes.

In his [latest platform](#), Trump vowed to "fight for and protect social security and Medicare with no cuts, including no changes to the retirement age."



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