

Insurer-backed group puts focus on hospital costs

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A coalition backed by health insurers and employers is launching a new effort to showcase hospital pricing as a central driver of rising health care costs, Axios has learned. Why it matters: Health care [affordability](#) is emerging as a key election-year issue, with the Trump administration and many in Congress increasingly questioning why drug prices and insurance premiums are as high as they are.

What we're hearing: Hospital Watch is calling for more scrutiny on hospitals — which [account](#) for the largest share of U.S. health spending.

- The [venture](#) is an initiative of Better Solutions for Healthcare, a coalition of health insurers and employer purchasers.
- "Lawmakers have begun to understand that they can have a health care debate about affordability in other parts of the health care ecosystem," said Adam Buckalew, senior adviser for the initiative and a health care lobbyist.
- "But it will not move the needle until you bring hospitals into the fold," he said.

State of play: Hospital Watch will highlight media reports about hospital pricing issues that the group says drive up system costs, like pricing markups and facility fees.

- The group also plans to publish its own reports and advocate for policies like stopping anticompetitive hospital contracting practices and improving enforcement of hospital price transparency rules, Buckalew told Axios.
- Hospitals have been required to post pricing information online since 2021, but there isn't evidence that patients are actually using that information, [KFF Health News recently reported](#).

The other side: Hospitals pushed back on the group's claim to be a watchdog effort.

- American Hospital Association CEO Rick Pollack noted that federal actuaries [said](#) earlier this year that health care spending growth in 2024 came from more utilization and higher intensity of services rendered, rather than rising costs.
- Hospital Watch amounts to "insurers deflecting from the fact that they have continuously increased out-of-pocket costs for patients, making access to health care unaffordable for hardworking Americans," said a spokesperson for the Federation of American Hospitals, which represents for-profit systems.
- "The fact is that hospitals are there for patients even when insurers turn their back