

Trump's Medicare director seeks to rein in expectations for TrumpRx

Chris Klomp discusses drug pricing, FDA turnover, and Medicare Advantage at STAT event



Chris Klomp speaks at STAT's Breakthrough East event. *Greg Riccardi for STAT*

By [Tara Bannow](#) – STAT News
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Chris Klomp, a top official at the federal health department, offered a reality check on President Trump's drug discount platform, TrumpRx, while speaking at a STAT event on Thursday.

Even as Trump has spoken about the platform in grandiose terms, calling it “transformative” and promising the “largest reduction in prescription drug prices in history,” Klomp offered a more measured perspective on stage at STAT's Breakthrough Summit East event in New York. He said it was never meant to be used by Americans with health insurance — which is the vast majority — and rejected the suggestion that Trump's drug policies amount to price caps.

“The goal was not actually some massive reach,” Klomp said, adding that “170 million Americans are commercially insured, 68 million Americans are on Medicare, the balance are on Medicaid and CHIP largely. TrumpRx is not for most of them, it's cash pay.”

That said, the platform has shown lower prices for GLP-1s and fertility drugs, which often aren't covered by health insurance, Klomp said. “But for many, your insurance benefit, where you already have insurance coverage, can be just as good so you may as well go there,” he said. Klomp joined the administration as director of Medicare, and was recently named chief counselor of the Department of Health and Human Services. In that role, he is a top adviser to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and has broad purview across the department. His responsibilities include the administration's efforts to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs.

Later at the event, biotech pioneer Stelios Papadopoulos praised Klomp, even as he aired worries about the direction of the Food and Drug Administration.

“This guy is amazing. I mean, he's knowledgeable, he's passionate. He is articulate. I mean, listening to him for a moment, I thought the FDA was doing okay,” Papadopoulos said on stage. “There is actually, in my mind the hope that a sensible, capable, dedicated person like him is in a position of influence.”

A STAT analysis of TrumpRx, which only displays brand-name drugs, found that about half the drugs on the platform had cheaper, generic versions available at the time the site launched.

Klomp said a legislative tweak would be necessary to make it so patients buying drugs through TrumpRx could have those purchases count toward their deductibles.

“The bigger point of TrumpRx in my mind and why it was so important to put that particular provision as one of the core four pillars of the most favored nation deals is that it’s a point of transparency,” Klomp said. “Transparency is the best disinfectant.”

Klomp’s comments on the Trump administration’s drug pricing agenda come as Republicans look to strengthen their message on health affordability going into the midterms. Whether the administration can ultimately increase patients’ access to drugs by lowering prices could be key to their success.

One of the president’s major goals, for U.S. patients to get medications at lower prices than other countries (so-called most-favored nation pricing), remains in progress.

The administration’s push to codify that policy has continued advancing, Klomp said, though he didn’t offer details on how the administration plans to get a bill passed into law.

Trump officials have been speaking with pharmaceutical companies about “the nature of the legislative text” they’re working on to see if industry can “buy in” on a version of the policy, he said. Klomp said administration leaders were speaking with lawmakers about the proposal, including members of key congressional committees such as House Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means, as well as the Senate Committee on Finance.

Klomp said the policy isn’t a price cap. Instead, he said that manufacturers that sign on can demand whatever price they want for their medicines in the U.S. They just cannot “undercut” the U.S. by offering cheaper prices in other wealthy countries.

Still, he didn't explain how government power would be wielded to guarantee Americans get drugs for less than other countries, a central goal for Trump.

Many Republican lawmakers have been skeptical of legislation to control drug pricing, at times shooing away White House suggestions to include it in legislative packages. Though there's no indication more lawmakers back the policy, administration officials are digging in on pushing it through Congress. Lobbyists representing pharmaceutical companies have intensified their efforts to convince lawmakers to oppose such legislation, they recently told STAT.

"The role of government, in my view, is to step in when markets fail," Klomp said, noting that the current market was creating "existential" risks to the country's ability to access treatments. "I don't believe in price caps, and I don't believe that's what we're doing — very strongly — with MFN."

Klomp also spoke on the personnel turmoil that has plagued the FDA over the past year. Longtime experts have been pushed out and overruled by political appointees at the agency. Officials like top vaccine and biologics chief Vinay Prasad have been dismissed, and brought back, and then exited again. Klomp acknowledged that the turnover is worrisome. "Trust is generally earned over time, and it's hard fought through battles," Klomp said. "It takes a long time to build and it's very easy to destroy."

Klomp said he's proud of FDA Commissioner Marty Makary's new speedy drug review program, and of the agency's shift to requiring just one clinical trial for new drugs instead of two. He said the success of those initiatives relies on career scientists, whom he called "extraordinary."

"Those reforms have to be operationalized over long periods of time," Klomp said. "That requires trust and buy-in from our career civil servants."

Klomp also emphasized that health care should not be politicized. FDA staff have expressed concerns that the White House and political appointees have increasingly involved themselves in scientific decisions;

for example via the selection of companies for Makary's new drug review program.

Klomp's other priorities include rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse in Medicare, particularly in home health and hospice and durable medical equipment. He said he's concerned there's been a rollback on value-based care over the past decade and he wants to fix that, particularly in Medicare Advantage, the private form of Medicare. Klomp also said he wants to achieve interoperability in health records.

"Liberate patient records," Klomp said. "Let us be very clear on CMS' official position on this: The record belongs to the patient. It goes everywhere the patient needs to go. We're serious about this."

Klomp said he thinks prior authorization is the "single biggest wedge" that's fractured trust between health insurers and providers. He said it began as a tool to help doctors deliver the best care but has become a cost management tool.

"I think if we can begin to solve the problem of prior authorization — and I think we can, and we're making progress — then maybe we can get stakeholders to trust each other a little more," Klomp said, "and maybe we can get them to perform as a higher performing team."