

Cookies Notification



This site uses cookies. By continuing to browse the site you are agreeing to our use of cookies.

[Find out more.](#)

Accept



RESEARCH ARTICLE

[HEALTH AFFAIRS](#) > [VOL. 11, NO. 4](#)

The Role of Federal Waivers in the Health Policy Process

[Allen Dobson](#), [Donald Moran](#), and [Gary Young](#)

PUBLISHED: WINTER 1992 No Access <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.11.4.72>

 [View Article](#)

Abstract

Prologue:

On 3 August 1992, after nearly a year of evaluation, Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis W. Sullivan denied Oregon the federal waiver it needed to proceed with its sweeping Medicaid reform plan. The denial was based on perceived violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which had gone into effect a month earlier. A number of policy analysts have questioned whether the ADA was truly a significant factor in the denial, or whether election-year politics played a role. Whatever the case, “if Oregon is any example, [the federal waiver process] has the potential to have a chilling effect ¹¹ on state efforts to reform health care, said Lynn Read, director of the Prioritized Health Care System in Oregon's Department of Human Services. The ramifications of Oregon's Medicaid waiver denial illustrate the power that such waivers have on the health policy process. While the increased role of the states in the health care reform debate has focused new attention on the federal waiver process, there is little published research in this area. Here a group of researchers from Lewin-VHI in Fairfax, Virginia, present their findings from a major new evaluation of federal waivers, which was funded by The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Allen Dobson, a vice-president at Lewin-VHI,

earned his doctorate in economics from Washington University. He was a principal with Consolidated Consulting Group and served in the federal government as director of the Office of Research, Health Care Financing Administration. Donald Moran, also a vice-president at Lewin-VHI, joined the research group in 1985 after his tenure at the Office of Management and Budget, where he was Executive Associate Director for Budget and Legislation. Gary Young, a senior associate at Lewin-VHI, earned a doctorate in business management and a law degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Abstract: Federal waiver programs enable states to bypass the requirements of federal programs such as Medicare and Medicaid to experiment with different ways of financing, organizing, and delivering health care. In tracking waiver activity from 1980 to 1990, the authors found that federal involvement with waivers lost momentum during the latter part of the 1980s, while state involvement increased. Three key issues dominate the discussion of waivers: administrative control, the role of the states, and the ability to evaluate demonstration waivers. Examination of the chronology of waiver activity suggests the emergence of a new era, wherein federal control reemerges as a way to counter the increased fragmentation of health policies among states. If this is the case, four areas need to be addressed: (1) balance of political and research objectives; (2) administrative flexibility for states; (3) careful scrutiny of rules; and (4) increased accountability. These recommendations can guide the federal government, with the states as partners, in its attempt to regain momentum in the use of waivers to expand the knowledge base.

TOPICS

[MEDICAID](#) | [MEDICARE](#) | [EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT INCOME SECURITY ACT](#) | [HEALTH REFORM](#) | [GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND POLICIES](#) | [LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS](#) | [SOCIAL SECURITY](#) | [SYSTEMS OF CARE](#) | [LEGISLATION](#) | [BUDGET-NEUTRALITY](#)

Loading Comments...

HealthAffairs

1101 Connecticut Ave NW #500

Washington, DC 20036

T 202 408 6801

F 301 654 2845

customerservice@healthaffairs.org

TOPICS

[Access & Use](#)

[Costs & Spending](#)

COVID-19
Health Equity
Health Reform
Leading To Health
More Topics

CONTENT

Journal
Forefront
Scholar
Briefs
Events
Podcasts
Collected Works

INFORMATION FOR

Authors
Request For Abstracts
Reviewers
Subscribers
Advertisers
Media News Room
Funders
Event Attendees

SERVICES & RESOURCES

Submit Content
Subscribe
Renew
Manage My Account
Purchase Content
Permissions
Alerts
Newsletter Sign Up
Advertising Kit

HEALTH AFFAIRS

About
Impact Report
Terms & Conditions
Privacy Policy
Jobs At Health Affairs
Fellowships
Contact Us



[Terms and conditions](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Project HOPE](#)

Health Affairs is pleased to offer [Free Access for low-income countries](#). Health Affairs gratefully acknowledges the support of many [funders](#).

Health Affairs is an official journal of [AcademyHealth](#).



Health Affairs and its health policy publications are editorially independent from its publisher, [Project HOPE](#), a nonprofit global health and humanitarian organization. Project HOPE has published Health Affairs since 1981.

Copyright 1995 - 2025 by [Project HOPE: The People-to-People Health Foundation, Inc.](#), eISSN 2694-233X.