

US senators aim to reform health agencies before next pandemic

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Two influential senators are calling for an overhaul of the U.S.'s public health programs in a new bill that would change how the government monitors disease outbreaks, stockpiles supplies and responds to future pandemic threats.

The legislation, released as a draft on Tuesday, also aims to refocus the

mission of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The proposal is being made by the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, which is led by its Chair Patty Murray, a Democratic senator for Washington state, and ranking member Richard Burr, a Republican senator for North Carolina.

The Senate HELP Committee has been working on the bill since last summer, according to people familiar with the matter, who asked not to be named as details of its longstanding development aren't public.

In a push to bolster U.S. preparedness for pandemics, the Senate HELP committee is calling for more federal leadership and accountability. The [draft legislation](#), with a shortened title of the PREVENT Pandemics Act, seeks to establish a task force. Its members would be appointed by bipartisan congressional leadership and assess the country's preparedness for pandemics, while recommending improvements to the U.S. president and Congress.

The legislation also looks to spur better coordination between U.S. health agencies, making changes at the the CDC and Food and Drug Administration.

It would require the Senate to confirm the CDC director, and would establish clear functions for that role. One such responsibility would be strengthening U.S. genomic sequencing capabilities so that the nation can more quickly detect variants and their spread. The CDC director would also improve the reporting and exchange of health data.

Meanwhile, the Senate HELP Committee bill would require U.S. regulators to improve [clinical trials](#) through digital strategies, and use real-world evidence to inform decision-making. It would also require the FDA to publish a report on best-practices for communicating with companies developing medical products. Notably, the legislation would

change the way the FDA inspects facilities, reviews products, revises labels, and penalizes the sellers of counterfeit devices.

The proposed [legislation](#) also looks to improve state and local readiness, address health disparities, and improve the collection of public [health](#) data.

Pandemic preparedness has increasingly become a hot-button issue among policymakers in Washington. In September, the Biden administration released its own [pandemic](#) preparedness plan. Bloomberg reported earlier this month that the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy had created a new task force focused on developing medical countermeasures to combat future coronavirus variants and other pandemic threats.

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