

September 20, 2019 ▲ Led by hospitals, health spending growth continues its recent decline

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▲ At \$3.85 trillion (seasonally adjusted annual rate), national health spending¹ in July 2019 was 4.3% higher than it was in July 2018.
- ▲ The July 2019 nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth over a 12-month period was 4.2%, and the resulting health spending share of GDP was 17.9% and 18.1% of PGDP.
- ▲ Spending in July 2019, year over year, increased in all major categories. Spending on prescription drugs grew the fastest, at 7.5%. Growth in spending on dental services was the slowest, at 0.9%.

National Health Spending and GDP*				
	Jul 2017	Jul 2018	Jun 2019	Jul 2019
GDP	19.48	20.64	21.38	21.51
National Health Spending	3.49	3.69	3.83	3.85
Health Spending Share of GDP	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%
Health Spending Share of PGDP	17.8%	18.0%	18.1%	18.1%
Growth from Prior 12 Months				
Health Spending	4.1%	5.6%	4.6%	4.3%
GDP	4.3%	6.0%	4.5%	4.2%
Health Spending Minus GDP	-0.2%	-0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Health Spending Minus PGDP	0.8%	1.2%	0.8%	0.4%

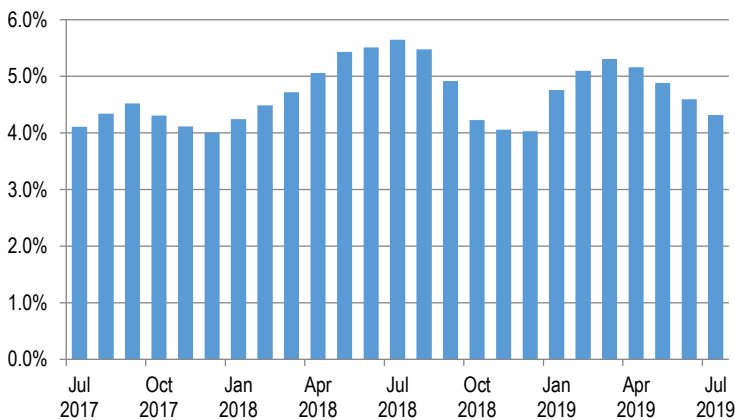
Source: Altarum monthly health spending estimates (see Methods on page 4). Monthly GDP is from Macroeconomic Advisers and Altarum estimates. PGDP, defined as what GDP would be at full employment, is from the quarterly Congressional Budget Office estimates, converted to monthly by Altarum.
* Spending is in trillions of dollars at a seasonally adjusted annual rate

HEALTH SPENDING

In July 2019, health spending reached a seasonally adjusted annual rate (SAAR) of \$3.85 trillion, an increase from its June value of \$3.83 trillion. July’s health spending accounted for 17.9% of GDP. As a share of potential GDP (PGDP), July spending was 18.1%. Year over year, health spending in July grew by 4.3%, down from its June value of 4.6% (Exhibit 1). Exhibits 7 and 8 show long-term comparisons.

Since the start of the recession in December 2007, real health spending (using the GDP deflator) through July 2019 has increased by 35.6% (an annual rate of 2.7%). Real GDP, excluding health spending, fell by more than 6% in mid-2009, and is now 18.1% above its December 2007 level. Including health care, real GDP in July was 20.9% above its pre-recession level (Exhibit 2).

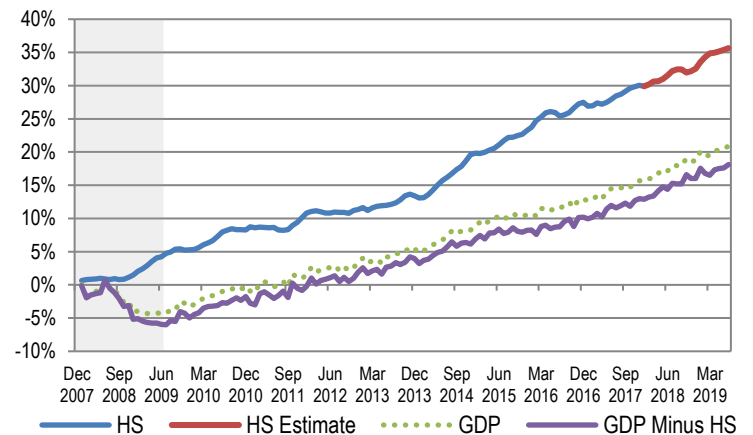
Exhibit 1. Year-over-Year Growth Rates in Health Spending



Source: Altarum monthly health spending estimates.

Note: This exhibit compares a given month’s health spending with that of the same month from the previous year.

Exhibit 2. Health Spending and GDP: Cumulative Percentage Change (Constant Dollars) Since December 2007



Source: “Health spending” (HS) consists of Altarum monthly estimates that match the government’s official National Health Expenditure Accounts (NHEA). “HS estimates” are Altarum estimates designed to be consistent with future NHEA values. Monthly GDP is from Macroeconomic Advisers and Altarum estimates.

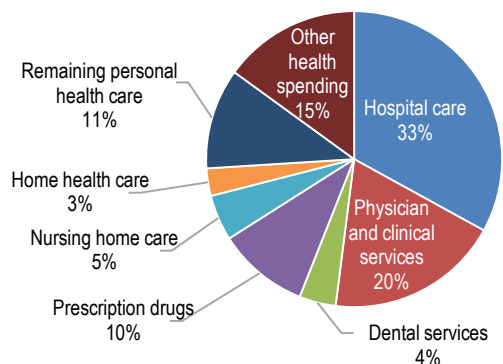
Note: Shading indicates the recession period.

HEALTH CARE SPENDING BY CATEGORY

In July 2019:

- ▲ Hospital spending was \$1.259 trillion (SAAR) and represented 33% of total health spending (Exhibits 3 and 5).
- ▲ Physician and clinical services spending was \$757 billion, representing 20% of total health spending.
- ▲ Prescription drug spending was \$375 billion, 10% of total health spending.
- ▲ Nursing home care and home health care spending combined were \$298 billion, 8% of total health spending.
- ▲ Spending on personal health care goods and services accounted for 85% of total health spending. Other major components include public health, research, construction, and net cost of private insurance.

Exhibit 3. Health Spending by Category, July 2019

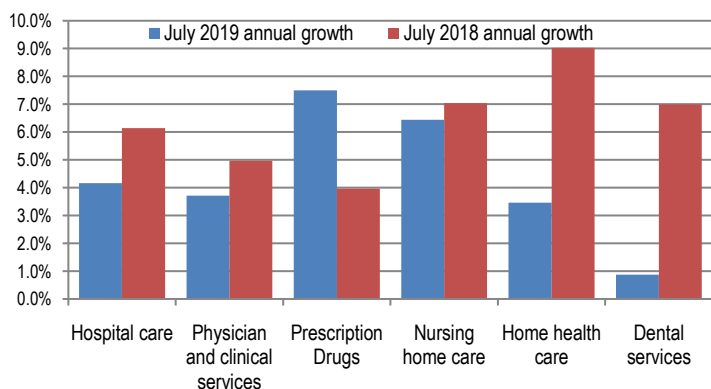


Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Notes: See Exhibit 5 for a complete list of spending categories.

Growth over the past 12 months: Spending on prescription drugs grew most rapidly among the major categories, at 7.5%. Expenditures for dental services grew the slowest, at 0.9%. For the preceding 12-month period ending July 2018, spending on home health care showed the highest growth among the major categories, at 9.0% each. Growth in prescription drug spending was lowest, at 4.0% (Exhibits 4 and 6).

Exhibit 4. Health Spending Year-over-Year Growth for Selected Categories



Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates.

DISCUSSION

The rate of growth of national health spending stands at 4.3% in July, year over year. Spending growth peaked for the year at 5.3% in March and has since shown a steady decline to its current rate. Year-over-year spending growth is 4.9% for the first 7 months of 2019.

This decline in the growth rate since March was led by hospital spending, which peaked in March at 6.8% and steadily declined to its current year-over-year rate of 4.2% for July. The 7-month year-to-date growth rate in hospital spending is 5.6%, year over year. The overall spending growth decline was partially offset by prescription drug spending, which reached a high for the year of 8.7% growth in March and has subsequently fluctuated around 7.5%, leading to 7.4% year-to-date growth, compared with the same period in 2018.

As we noted in last month's spending brief, recent upward revisions to our source data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis caused an increase in our 2019 expenditure estimates and growth rates. With these revisions, the 2019 year-over-year growth rate in national health spending through July of 4.9% puts 2019 spending growth on track to be close to CMS' forecasted growth rate of 4.8% for the entire year, and may end up slightly below the CMS forecast, if the current downward trend in spending growth continues.²

An early read comes from Credit Suisse.³ They estimate very low year-over-year growth in hospital admissions of 0.1%, accompanied by 1.0% growth in outpatient visits, in August 2019.

¹ Altarum's monthly estimates of national health spending are intended to approximate the official National Health Expenditure Accounts (NHEA) produced annually by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Our estimates match NHEA values that are currently available through 2017 and (for some spending categories) NHEA projections for 2018.

² Sisco AM et al. National Health Expenditure Projections, 2018–27: Economic and Demographic Trends Drive Spending And Enrollment Growth. *Health Affairs* 2019; 38(3): 491–501. Available at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05499>.

³ Credit Suisse (2019). CS Hospital Volume Tracker: September Survey – August Inpatient Volumes Up 0.1%; Outpatient Up 1.0%; Payer Mix/Births Positive. September 19: <https://tinyurl.com/y5t9ow8q>

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Altarum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit health care research and consulting organization. Altarum integrates independent research and client-centered consulting to deliver comprehensive, system-based solutions that improve health and health care. Since 2011, Altarum has researched cost growth trends and key drivers of U.S. health spending and formulated policy strategies to help bend the cost growth curve. In large part, this work was made possible through generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *The Health Sector Economic Indicators*SM reports are a monthly publication of Altarum and provide an analysis of health spending, employment, and prices. For more information, contact Paul Hughes-Cromwick, at 734-302-4616 or paul.hughes-cromwick@altarum.org. George Miller, PhD (principal author), Paul Hughes-Cromwick, Ani Turner, and Matt Daly, PhD, contributed to this brief. Media Contact: Sarah Litton, 202-772-5062. press@altarum.org. For more information, visit <http://altarum.org/solution/health-sector-spending>.

DETAILED HEALTH SPENDING

Exhibit 5. Monthly National Spending Estimates by Detailed Category

Levels (in billions of dollars)	Jul 2016	Jul 2017	Jul 2018	Jul 2019
GDP	\$18,677.4	\$19,477.8	\$20,639.9	\$21,506.1
National health spending	\$3,353.2	\$3,490.9	\$3,688.0	\$3,847.3
Personal health care	\$2,842.8	\$2,959.8	\$3,124.1	\$3,267.5
Hospital expenditures	\$1,090.6	\$1,139.2	\$1,209.2	\$1,259.5
Physician and clinical expenditures	\$658.9	\$695.4	\$729.9	\$757.1
Other professional services expenditures	\$92.8	\$97.0	\$104.3	\$109.8
Dental services expenditures	\$124.3	\$127.6	\$136.6	\$137.8
Other health, residential, and personal care expenditures	\$173.5	\$183.9	\$188.3	\$197.3
Home health care expenditures	\$93.2	\$96.8	\$105.5	\$109.1
Nursing care facilities and continuing care retirement communities	\$164.2	\$165.5	\$177.1	\$188.5
Prescription drug expenditures	\$331.1	\$335.2	\$348.5	\$374.7
Durable medical equipment expenditures	\$51.2	\$55.1	\$57.4	\$61.9
Nondurable medical products expenditures	\$63.1	\$64.1	\$67.3	\$71.9
Administration and net cost of health insurance expenditures	\$266.9	\$273.8	\$296.1	\$300.2
Public health activity	\$85.6	\$89.2	\$91.1	\$93.7
Research	\$47.5	\$50.9	\$53.5	\$56.3
Structures and equipment	\$110.4	\$117.3	\$123.2	\$129.6
National health spending share of GDP	18.0%	17.9%	17.9%	17.9%
National health spending share of PGDP	17.7%	17.8%	18.0%	18.1%

Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. The monthly GDP is from Macroeconomic Advisers and Altarum estimates.

Note: Spending is expressed in billions of dollars at a SAAR.

Exhibit 6. National Health Spending 12-Month Growth Rates by Detailed Category

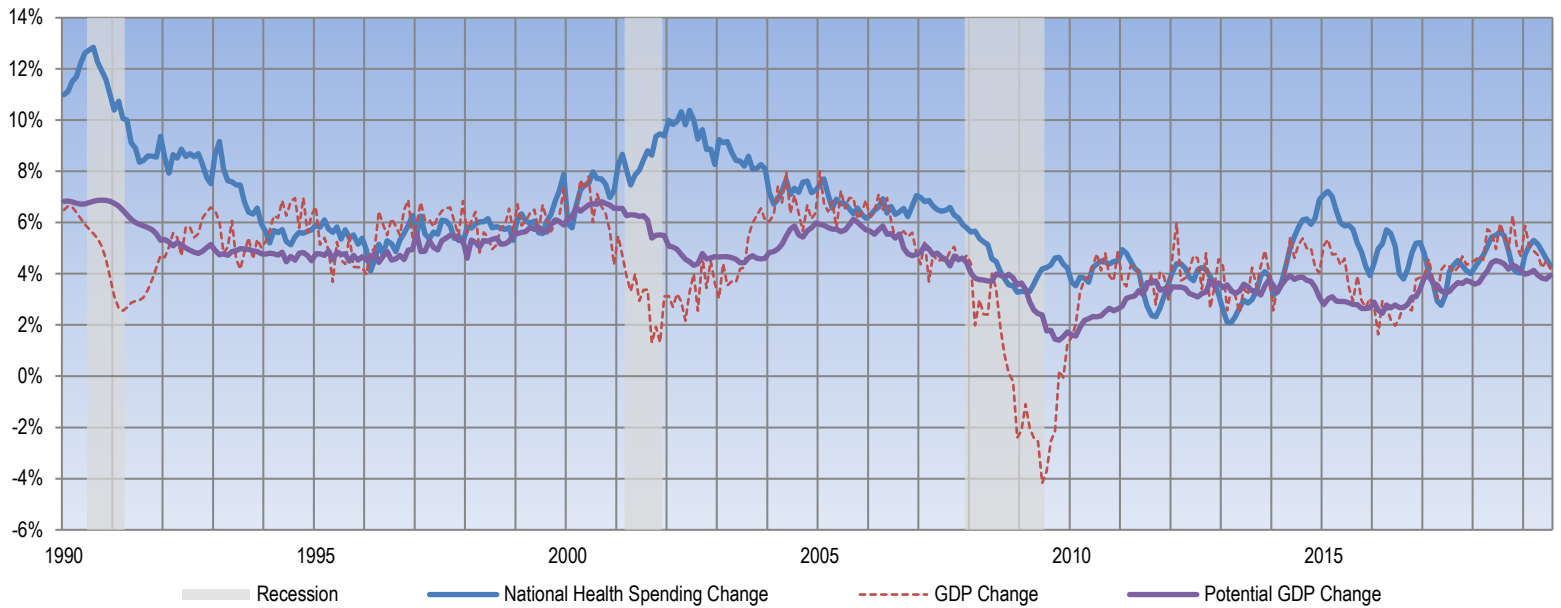
Growth Rates	Jul 2017	Jul 2018	Jul 2019
GDP	4.3%	6.0%	4.2%
National health spending	4.1%	5.6%	4.3%
Personal health care	4.1%	5.6%	4.6%
Hospital expenditures	4.5%	6.1%	4.2%
Physician and clinical expenditures	5.5%	5.0%	3.7%
Other professional services expenditures	4.5%	7.5%	5.3%
Dental services expenditures	2.7%	7.0%	0.9%
Other health, residential, and personal care expenditures	6.0%	2.4%	4.7%
Home health care expenditures	3.9%	9.0%	3.5%
Nursing care facilities and continuing care retirement communities	0.8%	7.0%	6.4%
Prescription drug expenditures	1.3%	4.0%	7.5%
Durable medical equipment expenditures	7.7%	4.2%	7.8%
Nondurable medical products expenditures	1.6%	5.0%	6.9%
Administration and net cost of health insurance expenditures	2.6%	8.2%	1.4%
Public health activity	4.2%	2.2%	2.9%
Research	7.1%	5.1%	5.2%
Structures and equipment	6.3%	5.0%	5.1%
National health spending minus GDP	-0.2%	-0.3%	0.1%
National health spending minus PGDP	0.8%	1.2%	0.4%

Source: Computed from Exhibit 5.

Note: This exhibit compares monthly national health spending to that of the same month from the previous year.

TIME SERIES TRACKER

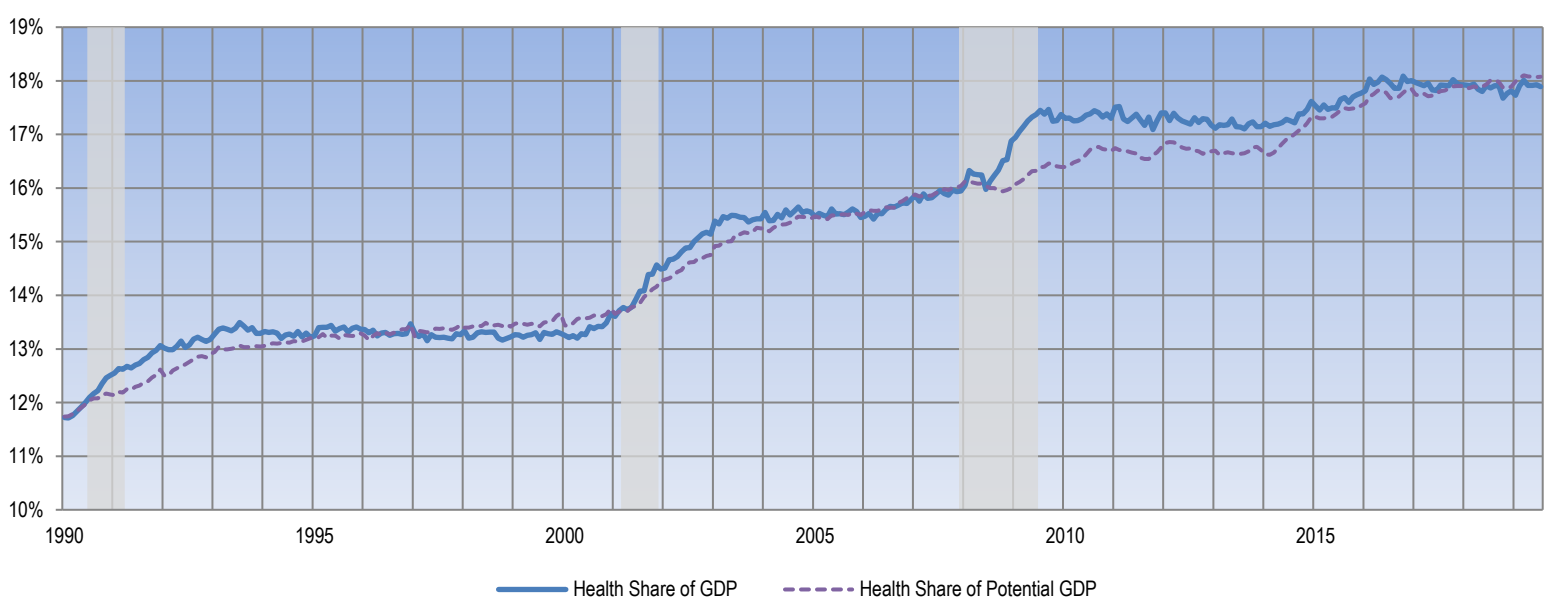
Exhibit 7. Year-over-Year Percentage Change in Spending and GDP



Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. Monthly GDP is from Macroeconomic Advisers and Altarum estimates.

Note: Lightly shaded bars denote recession periods.

Exhibit 8. Monthly Health Spending as a Percentage of Monthly GDP



Source: Altarum monthly national health spending estimates. Monthly GDP is from Macroeconomic Advisers and Altarum estimates. PGDP is from the U.S. Congressional Budget Office and has been converted to monthly estimates.

Note: Lightly shaded bars denote recession periods.

Methods. Altarum’s estimates are based on BEA monthly health spending (<http://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?ReqID=12&step=1>) and CMS annual NHE estimates (1990–2017) and projections (2018 and 2019) (<https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/index.html>). BEA spending categories are matched to NHEA components by using information presented in the following: Hartman, M. B., Kornfeld, R. J., & Catlin, A. C. (2010, September). A reconciliation of health care expenditures in the National Health Expenditures Accounts and in gross domestic product. *Survey of Current Business*, 90(9), 42–52. For all NHEA personal health care categories except “other health, residential, and personal care,” monthly estimates are based on BEA spending adjusted to NHEA by using annual ratios. For the remaining categories, national health spending estimates and projections are allocated across months by using a simple trend. Annual ratio adjustments through 2017 are based on NHEA actuals and ensure that monthly estimates sum exactly to NHEA annual amounts. The 2017 ratios are used to adjust BEA spending for months in 2018 and 2019.