



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

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Healthcare News At A Glance

Highlighted Report and Studies of the Week

1. The Aligning Efforts to Improve Quality report found a 21 percent decrease in hospital-acquired conditions between 2010 and 2015.
2. A study published in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* observed a 40 percent reduction in the risk of flu-related hospitalizations in pregnant women who received the flu shot compared with those who did not.
3. A study published in *PLOS Medicine* found that 67.2 percent of inmates were receiving care for HIV one year after being released. There was a 14 percentage point reduction in this figure two years after release from prison.
4. The Government Accountability Office determined that nearly 20 percent of low-income individuals chose to forgo care if they were living in a state that did not expand Medicaid. This figure was 9 percent in states that did expand Medicaid.

World Health Organization (WHO) Updates

The WHO updated their guidelines in regards to noise levels that could significantly impact health. The guidelines indicate that noise is an environmental health risk that can have an impact on blood pressure and heart disease and can exacerbate chronic health conditions. The new recommendation for nighttime noise is 45 decibels, 10 decibels less than what 40 percent of residents in the European Union are exposed to on a daily basis.

President signs two bills making gag clauses illegal– Both bills ban prescription drug plans from hindering a pharmacist's ability to notify the enrollee if a cheaper alternative exists without using their health insurance.

Department of Health and Human Services determines that Affordable Care Act (ACA) premiums will decrease during the 2019 open-enrollment period– The department expects a 1.5 percent decrease in premiums for the silver plan which is one of the more widely utilized plans. Additionally, the number of insurers is expected to rise for the first time in 3 years. According to a report issued by the Brookings Institute, these premiums would have decreased by an average of 4.5 percent had the threat of dismantling the ACA been nonexistent.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will no longer have the Particulate Matter Review Panel– The 20-member expert panel was responsible for providing the EPA with safety guidelines regarding particulate matter levels. Current members affiliated with one of the other advisory committees are concerned with the personnel changes that are taking place in some of the remaining committees because of the reduced number of members and the increased workload that may lead to an oversight in the future.

Resolution to overturn rule on short-term health insurance plans fell short of majority vote– Last week, a resolution that could have halted the short-term insurance plans failed to move out of the Senate after a 50-50 tie.

Department of Justice (DOJ) gives conditional approval for Aetna and CVS health merger– The department has requested Aetna to sell its Medicare Part D prescription drug business before moving on with the \$69 billion merger. This merger may absorb the independent pharmacy benefit managers. Thousands of CVS pharmacies and clinics may begin hiring nurses and other healthcare staff to provide care.

California

First Responders take the Southern California Gas company to court, four years after being exposed to toxic chemicals in largest natural gas leak in US history

The firefighters allege that they were assured by the company that the leak posed no danger, and as a result, approached the area without necessary protective gear. They believe the company did this despite knowing about the carcinogenic chemicals released by the gas. The company already settled a \$120 million lawsuit with the state and local governments for the leak.

Other States

Four states have marijuana legalization on their ballots– This November, Michigan and North Dakota have ballot initiatives to legalize recreational marijuana while Utah and Missouri will be deciding whether or not to legalize medical marijuana. As of now, medical marijuana use is legal in 31 states while recreational marijuana use is legal in 9 states.

Last week, New York City passes law allowing for gender-neutral designation on birth certificates– Individuals who were born in the city and who wish to make changes may do so without a doctor's note. A District Court in Denver may change the tide for nonbinary identification on US passports after a judge declared that its State Department must allow for gender-neutral passports. Maine, Oregon, California, and Washington D.C. provide nonbinary driver's licenses.

Washington state's death penalty formally struck down by Washington Supreme Court– The court determined that the death penalty was associated with racial bias. With this ruling, Washington is now the 20th state to put an end to capital punishment. The last death penalty that was carried out in the state occurred in 2010. Massachusetts and Connecticut previously suspended their death penalties on the same basis.

In October, 4,109 Medicaid beneficiaries in Arkansas lost their health insurance due to work requirements– In total, close to 8,500 individuals have lost their health insurance up until now due to a failure to report work requirements. This means that individuals who are meeting the work requirements but not reporting them may have also lost their insurance. According to a report published by the Kaiser Family Foundation, many beneficiaries are still unaware of the requirements and possible exemptions. The report also discusses a lack of computer literacy and internet access as additional reasons why beneficiaries did not access the online portal.

Patients turned away from Florida hospitals after Hurricane Michael causes destruction– Many hospitals have either shut down or are in the process of shutting down after evacuating patients. Many hospitals and nursing homes are running on backup generators. Six deaths have been reported as a result of the storm. In one hospital, 40 patients in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) were rushed down multiple flights of stairs, or the elevator after the outer layer of glass surrounding the windows in the ICU began to shatter. Phone lines are also down, and many people have been unable to get a hold of family members or their caretakers in nursing homes.

Pfizer settled on lawsuit filed by the New York State Attorney General alleging that the company had misleading statements on its drug copayment coupons program– The company will pay close to \$700,000 in fines and restitution. The coupons stated that consumers would not have to pay more than a certain dollar amount (\$15, \$20, or \$25) by presenting them. The coupons also stated limits to the total savings, but these were in fine print. One consumer ended up with a bill for close to \$140 after expecting one for \$15. She later received a \$130 refund from the company.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released its 5-star ratings for Medicare Advantage and Part D Prescription Plans shortly before the enrollment period

Nineteen plans received the 5-star rating that was based on how the plans performed on a number of health measures such as cancer screening, annual flu vaccine, and mental health maintenance. The ratings do not include any measures that are related to CMS' sanctions, noncompliance complaints, or other penalties. Beneficiaries will be allowed to choose a plan that has a rating of four stars or more. Becker's Hospital Review compiled the following list of 5-star contracts offering both Medicare Parts C and D:

1. Kelsey-Seybold Plan Administrators
2. Kaiser Foundation Health Plan (two different contracts)
3. Humana's Careplus Health Plans
4. Guidewell's Health Options
5. Medical Associates Health Plan
6. Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of The Mid-Atlantic States (two different contracts)
7. Tufts Associated Health Maintenance Organizations
8. Humana's Cariten Health Plan
9. Care Wisconsin Health Plan
10. Cigna's Healthspring of Florida
11. Anthem's Healthsun Health Plans
12. Martin's Point Generations Advantage
13. Gundersen Health Plan of Minnesota

Newsbytes Relevant to Our Strategic Priorities



To bring focus to our work, the Institute for Health Policy and Leadership has identified three strategic priorities: oral health, mental health and hunger as a health issue. This segment highlights news articles relevant to these priorities.

Oral Health

Refugees in Minnesota face cultural barriers amongst others when trying to access oral health care– Many of the refugees come from camps where toothpaste and clean water are not always available. Refugees have access to Medicaid or some form of assistance that confers them with oral health benefits. Many Medicaid providers, however, do not accept the alternate forms, possibly due to the low reimbursement rates. Given such barriers, refugees suffer from poor oral health which can translate to poor health outcomes.

Hunger as a Health Issue

The United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization celebrated its 73rd year with World Food Day on October 16, 2018– The date is meant to serve as a reminder that food insecurity, hunger, and starvation affect millions of adults and children every year. The Sustainable Development Goal number 2 is to end hunger worldwide by 2030. Some of the issues include lack of technology, lack of coherent policies, and lack of economic stability as identified by the Brookings Institute. To learn more about how food insecurity affects the mental health of children, please check out our [issue brief](#).

Mental/ Behavioral Health

The 11th Seeds of Hope celebration at the Loma Linda University Centennial Complex served as a reminder of the importance of mental health to whole person care– The event was organized as a fundraiser for the Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center (BMC). It also served as a celebration of the achievements and success stories of those who suffer from mental illness. The keynote speaker was Natasha Tracy, the author of *Lost Marbles: Insights into My Life with Depression & Bipolar*. Natasha remarked on how impressed she was regarding the facilities, staff, and the patient-centric philosophy at the BMC.