



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

Institute for Health Policy and Leadership

January 15, 2020 | Issue 91

Healthcare News At A Glance



National

Pharmaceutical prices increase at the start of the year— As of last week, pharmaceutical companies increased the prices of more than 400 products by a median of 5 percent. For instance, Pfizer increased the price on 27 percent of its drugs by an average of 5.6 percent. Many popular brand-name pharmaceutical prices increased and price hikes are expected throughout the month. Some companies remarked that the list prices do not reflect the actual cost that a consumer would pay. The list prices affect the uninsured and those with high deductibles. In other news, drug companies are continuing to protest the elimination of a 10-year market exclusivity provision in the North American trade deal that is moving through the Senate.

Annual National Preparedness Report does not mention climate change— In the Federal Management Agency's (FEMA) eighth annual report about the threats to the United States, phrases related to climate change are not included. The latest report includes mention of construction damage from natural disasters such as floods, wildfires, and hurricanes and suggests stronger building codes and private-sector mitigation investments. In similar news, a top official who was nominated to run FEMA resigned last month after his nomination was withdrawn by a Senate committee.

US Justice Department recovers over \$2.6 billion from healthcare fraud and false claim lawsuits— Last year, the Justice Department recovered more money than the previous two years from settlements and judgements related to healthcare fraud. The two largest settlements were from opioid manufacturing companies including one that involved kickbacks to clinicians for prescribing opioids. Seven pharmaceutical companies paid for settlements involving giving money for Medicare patients' copayments through foundations.

Juul received 2,600 health complaints in the first three years of operations according to a Food and Drug Administration Report— In its first three years, customers filed complaints regarding blistered lips, vomiting, and burns related to use of Juul products. Only one complaint was considered a serious adverse event. The company's spokesperson said the rate of complaints was "very low." In similar news, the youngest vaping-related death was reported in Texas as a 15-year-old died from lung damage.

Highlighted Healthcare Studies

1. Study in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* finds that the federal government did not report over 7,000 prescription opioid medication and heroin drug overdoses between 2008 and 2017 that occurred in Florida, signifying a gap between federal and state data.
2. Study in *JAMA Internal Medicine* finds that nearly 1.4 million girls and young women may have received a medically unnecessary pelvic exam and 1.6 million may have received a medically unnecessary Pap test between 2011 and 2017.
3. Study in *Nature Medicine* estimates that a temperature increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius could result in 1,600 additional deaths in the US with a majority of those deaths affecting men over the next year if there is no mitigation plan in place.
4. Study in *Annals of Internal Medicine* finds that spending on healthcare administration in the United States costs four times as much as spending on healthcare administration in Canada.
5. Study in *Trauma Surgery & Acute Open Care* finds that roughly 20 percent of Florida youth (ages 5-15) were over-triaged and brought to a trauma center for a mild or moderate injury between 2012 and 2014.
6. Study in the *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* finds that exposure to the December 2017 Lilac Fire's wildfire smoke in San Diego County was associated with 16 additional respiratory-related emergency room visits per day across all pediatric ages.

California

Governor Newsom to sign executive order allowing vacant state land to be used for emergency shelters– The Governor recently started a week-long listening tour after proposing the creation of a \$750 million fund in the 2020-2021 budget to address the homelessness crisis in California. The Governor has also called for the deployment of state-owned travel trailers and tents to areas with high number of homeless individuals.

Bill to ban medically unnecessary treatments for intersex infants fails to make it through key committee– The bill would have banned all procedures for intersex children (six years and younger) that were not deemed medically necessary by the Medical Board of California. The lawmakers who rejected the bill stated that the definition of “intersex” was too broad and could limit a physician’s abilities to provide appropriate care for patients with complexities.



Other States



Florida lawmakers looking to pass a bill to allow medication-dispensing kiosks– If passed, patients would be able to use an automated pharmacy, similar to a vending machine, to retrieve prescription drugs. Additionally, the bill would allow for the 24-hours a day, 7 days a week kiosk to be placed off-site in areas where pharmacies or access to medications is limited. Florida state law allows for correctional institutions, hospices, and long-term facilities to operate drug dispensing machines.

Kansas lawmakers and governor reach deal to expand Medicaid– The bill has not yet been signed into law but the governor announced that a deal has been made to pass the legislation later this year. The program is expected to begin on January 1, 2021, and would provide healthcare coverage to more than 100,000 low-income individuals in the state with an eligibility at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

Louisiana sees record low individual exchange signups through the Affordable Care Act– For the second year in a row, the signups for health insurance dropped from 92,948 individuals last year to 87,748 this year. The insurance commissioner for the state attributes the decline in enrollment to the average 12 percent increase in premiums, people migrating out of the state, and more people moving to employer-sponsored insurance.

Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court to decide whether psychiatric patients can be held in hospital emergency rooms (ERs) for more than 72 hours– The issue comes after it was discovered that many patients who were involuntarily hospitalized in the ER were staying for longer than three days despite the three-day limit. The attorney for Massachusetts General Hospital is pushing for the three-day limit to apply solely to the psychiatric facility and not the emergency room as patients may have different needs when presented in an emergency room. Another attorney involved in the case argued that ERs have had to release patients who they felt could be a threat to themselves. The court is expected to make a ruling in the coming months.

Ohio’s Department of Job and Family Services estimates that up to 20,000 Ohioans could lose their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits under the stricter work requirements– Under the current law, able-bodied adults who do not have dependents are restricted to three months of SNAP benefits over three years unless they are partaking in work-related programs for 80 hours a month. The state gained a waiver from these requirements for 42 of its 88 counties that had higher unemployment rates. The new rule that has been proposed by the president’s administration states that the county’s employment rate in the last two years must be more than 6 percent in order to be eligible for the waiver. This will bring the number of eligible counties down from 42 to 13 and the number of eligible beneficiaries from 23,000 to 3,700.

New Jersey joins other states in pushing for bill to ban the sale of flavored vaping products– The state’s lawmakers have introduced the ban which is headed to the governor’s desk. The governor has until January 21st to sign the bill that would prohibit the sale and distribution of electronic smoking devices that have any “distinguishable flavor” or aroma. A minimum fine of \$250 could be imposed for the first offense.

Kaiser Family Foundation Analysis of Surprise Medical Bills

The Kaiser Family Foundation analyzed claims data from employer plans to determine the incidence of out-of-network charges for hospital stays and emergency visits. The analysis indicated that 18 percent of emergency visits and 16 percent of in-network hospital stays resulted in an at least one out-of-network charge in 2017. The following states were deemed as states with the highest and lowest chance of a person with employer coverage receiving at least one out-of-network charge for either an emergency visit or in-network inpatient stay:

Highest chance

- Texas (38%)
- New York (28%)
- Florida (22%)
- New Jersey (24%)
- Kansas (24%)

Lowest chance

- Minnesota (3%)
- South Dakota (4%)
- Nebraska (4%)
- Mississippi (6%)
- Maine (7%)

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

Dentists in North Carolina partaking in efforts to combat the opioid epidemic–

Numerous dentists are partaking in efforts to provide alternative pain medications after oral surgeries such as wisdom tooth extraction. The dentists are also partaking in an effort to speak to their peers about using alternatives to opioids for pain management. In North Carolina, 30 percent of the time, a youth's first opioid prescription is given at a dentist office, and 2,000 people died from opioid overdose in 2017.

Hunger as a Health Issue

Haitians continue to suffer the effects of hunger and food insecurity ten years after the massive earthquake–

Prolonged periods of drought have played a major factor in the lack of agricultural output. Hurricane Matthew and violent protests due to political instability in the country made it difficult to provide foreign aid. Estimates indicate that 11,000 children under the age of five will suffer from severe malnutrition this year.

Mental/ Behavioral Health

Lawmakers in Alaska looking to pass legislation to require mental health curriculum in all K-12 classrooms–

House Bill 181 calls on Alaska's educational boards to develop mental health curriculum guidelines to ensure that students are provided with information about mental health resources and treatment. The standards would be developed with expert stakeholder input if the bill is passed. A 2017 study of high school youth found that more than one in three youth reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness. The legislature will reconvene on January 21st.

If you would like to subscribe to our weekly newsletter, please [click here!](#)