



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

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Healthcare News At A Glance



National

Health and Human Services (HHS) will move forward with new liver transplant policy– Before the new policy was introduced, hospitals that performed transplants had priority over organs that were donated in the area. The new policy established that livers must now be given to the neediest patients who are within 500 nautical miles of the donor. Hospitals and patients on the transplant list sued HHS over the policy last year stating that the new policy would decrease liver availability in their area. Recently, a US district refused to block the new policy and allowed it to move forward.

Acupuncture will now be covered under Medicare– The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) made the decision to cover 12 acupuncture sessions in 90 days for Medicare patients with chronic low back pain. Chronic lower back pain is defined as one that lasts for 12 weeks or longer without any identifiable systemic cause. CMS stated that the decision was made in order to provide patients with an alternative to opioids.

American College of Physicians announces support for a single-payer system– With 159,000 internal medicine physicians, the second largest physicians' group in the country endorsed both Medicare for All and a public insurance option.

Department of Agriculture announces new proposal to loosen nutrition guidelines for school lunches– Under the Obama administration, school lunch plans were required to increase fruits and vegetables in meals, provide food with reduced sodium, serve only skim or low-fat milk, and remove trans-fat. Recently, the Department of Agriculture announced plans to roll back the requirements in order to allow schools to have more flexibility and to cut down on food waste. Opponents say this will allow for unhealthy foods to be reintroduced.

Supreme Court to review Arkansas law that would allow pharmacy reimbursement rates to cover cost of buying pharmaceuticals– The Supreme Court will review the Eighth Circuit Court's ruling to halt an Arkansas' law that would allow pharmacy reimbursements to cover the cost of purchasing drugs. The National Association of Chain Drug Stores is supporting the legislation stating that this will bring fairness to the process. In other news, the Supreme Court will hear the case regarding whether religious exemptions can be applied to the Affordable Care Act mandate on birth control coverage by employer-based insurance.

Highlighted Healthcare Studies

1. Study in *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Internal Medicine* finds that lowering the default prescription volumes for opioids in the electronic health record was associated with a reduction in the number of opioids prescribed to patients by clinicians.
2. Study in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* finds that 2 million US adults who reported usage of marijuana also have cardiovascular disease. The study also suggested that smoking marijuana can trigger heart attacks among young patients with cardiovascular disease.
3. Study in *JAMA Pediatrics* finds that only 30 percent of the Medicaid adolescents and young adults who experienced nonfatal opioid overdose received treatment within 30 days of the overdose, 29.3 percent received behavioral health services only, and 1.9 percent received medications.
4. Study in *The Lancet JAMA* finds that global sepsis incidence decreased by 19 percent and sepsis deaths decreased by 30 percent between 1990 and 2017. The study also found that 85 percent of the cases of sepsis occurred in low- or middle-income countries and more than 4 in 10 cases affected children under 5 years.
5. Study in *The British Medical Journal* finds that there were no significant increases in mortality risks for patients who went to hospitals that were penalized for higher-than-average readmission rates between 2008 and 2016.

California

California to see new health care bills and budget initiatives– Among the initiatives and proposals, there is one proposal to allow the state of California to have its own generic drug label. Under this proposal, California would hold contracts with generic manufacturers to offer the drugs to California at a lower price. Another budget initiative includes a \$1.4 billion allocation for housing and healthcare services for the homeless and an additional \$25 million for pilot programs to house the homeless with mental health needs in community programs. California is now the first state to offer Medi-Cal to all income-eligible residents until the age of 26, regardless of immigration status. There are also new proposals to tackle the vaping epidemic such as a bill to ban retail of flavored e-cigarettes, e-hookahs, and e-pipes and the proposal for a new tax on e-cigarette products– \$2 for every 40 milligrams of nicotine.

University of San Diego researchers find that the closure of a coal-fired power plant led to thousands of saved lives– The researchers estimate that between 2005 and 2016, more than 26,000 lives were saved and 570 million bushels of corn, soybean, and wheat were preserved after a coal-fired plant was shut down. Alternatively, they found that the plants that remained in operation were associated with 329,000 premature deaths and 10.2 billion bushels of crops lost– nearly half of what the US produces annually.

More than 150 people catch norovirus after trip to Yosemite National Park– Roughly 170 people, including park visitors and employees, fell sick this month. Norovirus is a heavily contagious virus that can be spread through contact with surfaces that have been exposed to the virus. The National Park Service and other health agencies are investigating the outbreak.

Other States

Texas county sees first case of rubella since 1999– The person was thought to have contracted rubella from overseas. Rubella is contracted similar to measles and has similar symptoms, although it is slightly less contagious. The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is meant to prevent contraction of rubella. The virus was eradicated in the United States in 2004, with fewer than ten cases recorded annually. Unvaccinated pregnant women are at highest risk of contracting the virus and passing it onto their unborn child.

Connecticut policies may remove the ability to send minors under the age of 12 to juvenile court– Currently, minors as young as 7 can be tried in juvenile court. The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee for the state of Connecticut recently proposed a new rule that would divert youth under the age of 12 from the criminal justice system to Children's Behavioral Health Services System, Youth Services Bureaus, or a Juvenile Review Board. In 2019, more than 100 children under the age of 12 were referred to juvenile court and a majority were sent for misdemeanors. Most were rarely prosecuted. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has stated that criminal prosecution for children under the age of 12 is not acceptable.

Wyoming's Medicaid waiver proposal to cover air ambulances for all people regardless of income was denied– CMS rejected the waiver on the basis that federal aviation laws already regulate air ambulance billing. The director of CMS stated that the state cannot use Medicaid's structure to provide services to other individuals. Opponents of the waiver stated that such a policy would draw resources away from Medicaid beneficiaries that need it the most. In 2017, roughly 7 in 10 ambulance transports throughout the country were out-of-network with a median charge of \$36,400 for a helicopter transport.

Multiple states and New York City file lawsuit against the new rules around the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)– The rule was announced in December 2019 and would require stricter work requirements in order for people to be eligible for SNAP. Some estimates indicated that nearly 688,000 individuals could possibly lose their SNAP benefits. The lawsuit seeks an injunction to block the rule from going into effect on April 1, 2020.

South Carolina public employees will receive access to telehealth services under new partnership between the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority and the Medical University of South Carolina– Under this new partnership, 500,000 members and their covered dependents now have access to telehealth benefits through the medical center.

Kaiser Permanente's northwest region to put \$5.1 million into housing homeless seniors with complex health issues in Oregon– The funds will be used to provide housing navigation, move-in and rental assistance, and support services for 300 homeless seniors. The funds will be administered through Health Share of Oregon which is a coordinated care organization that manages the state's Medicaid resources for the region.

Kaiser Family Foundation's Analysis on Opioid Death Rates

The Kaiser Family Foundation utilized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics data to determine the number of opioid overdose deaths as a fraction of total drug overdose deaths per state in 2017. Below are the states with the highest and lowest opioid overdose deaths as a percent of all drug overdose deaths.

States with the Highest Percent of Opioid Deaths

1. New Hampshire (91%)
2. Connecticut (89%)
3. Maryland (88%)
4. Massachusetts (88%)
5. Rhode Island (87%)

States with the Lowest Percent of Opioid Deaths

1. Hawaii (26%)
2. Montana (32%)
3. Louisiana (37%)
4. Nebraska (39%)
5. Arkansas (42%)

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

Large discrepancy exists between rural and urban rates of dental supply in Pennsylvania– According to a recent report by the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH), there are nearly twice as many dentists in urban areas than rural areas, possibly contributing to the oral health disparities between urban and rural areas. Many rural areas do not have access to Medicaid dental services and families in rural areas often have to travel long distances to obtain oral health care.

Hunger as a Health Issue

Researchers at the University of Toronto observe complex relationship between hunger, disease, injury, and death in new study– Published in the *Canadian Medical Journal*, the study indicates that more than 4 million Canadians (roughly 11 percent of the population) are food insecure and skip their meals on a regular basis. The study also highlighted the increased risk of death from illness and mental health issues as a result of hunger.

Mental/ Behavioral Health

Music industry looking to tackle poor mental health– The Music Industry Research Association found that 50 percent of the musicians were dealing with depression and 12 percent reported dealing with suicidal thoughts. These numbers are significantly greater than what is observed in the general public. Loneliness, alcohol and drug dependence, lack of consistent relationships, and poor health habits are all contributors to the issue. Recently, there have been numerous organizations collecting data and raising awareness about ways to tackle poor mental health among musicians. Many celebrity singers have also opened up about their battles with depression.

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