

California

Walgreens will pay \$7.5 million settlement for hiring an unlicensed pharmacist in Alameda County– The district attorneys of Alameda and Santa Clara counties sued Walgreens for allowing an unlicensed pharmacist to work in multiple locations for the last ten years. The pharmacist filled 745,000 prescriptions, with 13 percent for controlled substances. The company failed to check the pharmacist's credentials. The company agreed to pay the penalties, costs, and remedial payments and to implement a verification program to check for licenses.

Bike fatalities in California get worse– Between 2016 and 2018, more than 450 cyclists were killed in traffic accidents. The bike fatality rate of 3.9 per million people was the highest over a three-year period since the mid-1990s. Nationwide, the rate is 2.6 per million people. Los Angeles County had the highest number of fatalities. San Bernardino County and Riverside County were among the top ten counties with the highest number of fatal bike accidents.

California's Bureau of Cannabis Control reports thousands of tainted marijuana vape pens– The bureau found that more than 10,000 seized devices had undisclosed additives such as vitamin E acetate. The labels also misrepresented the THC content. The bureau urged consumers to purchase these products from licensed businesses only.

Other States

Georgia granted \$1.1 million to investigate sources of lead in drinking water at schools– The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) granted the state with the funds to determine how lead is ending up in drinking water at schools and child care facilities after the state received a failing grade in a 2019 report by Environment America. The state will focus on high-risk communities. The EPA is also offering free soil sampling for residents in specific Georgia neighborhoods.

Virginia House and Senate pass multiple firearm-regulation legislation– The bills seek to enact background checks for all gun sales; require owners to report missing firearms within 24 hours; allow local municipalities to enact stricter firearm laws; establish "red flag" laws that allow authorities to seize firearms from those who are a threat to themselves or others; only allow one handgun purchase per month; and expand the youth age at which it is considered a felony to leave a firearm from 14 years to 18 years of age.

Pediatricians and organizations participate in New York City's United Hospital Fund Partnerships for Early Childhood Development initiative– The initiative is the collaboration of pediatricians and community organizations to address food insecurity, child care needs, housing, and other social determinants of health that can impact youth. The program started in 2017 and nearly 12,000 families have been screened since then. The group successfully helped more than 1,500 families connect to services last year. In similar news, Molina Healthcare in Columbus, Ohio, launched a center named The National Molina Healthcare Social Determinants of Health Innovation Center. The center's focus will be on addressing community factors that create barriers to health care. The initiative will include data collection and analysis of the healthcare system's members' social determinants data.

House representative from Illinois introduces federal legislation to discourage ambulance diversions– The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* found that many hospitals in Chicago were turning away ambulances. The data is not collected at the state level and is often suppressed. According to the investigation, at least 21 deaths occurred from this practice in various states. The state of Massachusetts banned diversions nearly a decade ago. The Congressman from Illinois has introduced a federal bill that would require hospitals to report ambulance diversion.

City of Boston reaches \$10 million fundraising goal two years ahead of schedule– The Boston Way's Home Fund reached its \$10 million goal recently, two years of the anticipated 2022 deadline. The funds will be used to create long-term housing options for homeless men and women. The housing will include wrap-around services including mental health assistance, abuse counseling, employment services, and community-based health care. Last year, the city had 6,203 homeless individuals of which 121 were unsheltered.

State of Tobacco Control

The American Lung Association released its 18th annual *State of Tobacco Control* report this year. The report analyzes state and federal laws to determine the measures that are the most and least successful.

- **Establishment of a tobacco prevention and control fund:** Alaska, California, and Maine were the only states to have received an “A” grade while 42 other states received an “F” grade.
- **Smokefree air laws:** Nine states received an “F” grade.
- **Access to cessation services:** Only Colorado, Maine, and Minnesota received an “A” grade.
- **State tobacco taxes:** No state received an “A” grade while 35 states received an “F.”
- **Tobacco 21 laws:** Before 2019, 19 states had laws that raised the minimum age for tobacco products to 21. Now, 21 years is the official age for the consumption of tobacco products.

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

Study highlights the need for more comprehensive oral health measures in Oregon– The Oregon Health and Sciences University found that 40 percent of Medicaid-enrolled children did not receive oral health services in 2018. The study highlighted racial disparities, with African American children having the least opportunity to access oral health services. An oral health bill that made it through the House will set up an oral health campaign and a pilot program under the Oregon Health Authority if passed.

Hunger as a Health Issue

Professors look for ways to address “hidden hunger”– Hidden hunger speaks to the idea that the human diet may lack essential vitamins and minerals. A professor from the University of Melbourne School of Biosciences found that two billion people suffered from iron and zinc deficiencies worldwide due to high cereal consumption. Researchers are advocating for biofortification and plant biotechnology of wheat and rice to increase the nutritional quality of crops.

Mental/ Behavioral Health

Schools are increasingly moving towards allowing students to have excused absences for mental health– Minnesota passed such a bill in 2009. Oregon and Utah are pushing for similar measures after the latest CDC report found that suicide rates for youth between the ages of 10 and 24 increased by 56 percent.