



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

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Healthcare News At A Glance



National

Department of Justice charges multiple people in \$1.2 billion Medicare scheme– The scheme involved physicians and 130 medical-device companies that contacted Medicare beneficiaries and offered them “free” orthopedic braces. The beneficiaries were transferred to call centers that verified the coverage, took the prescriptions, and mailed the braces. The centers billed Medicare for the braces and then paid kickbacks to the physicians and medical-device companies. Defendants from multiple states were charged.

Rite Aid will stop selling e-cigarettes and vaping devices in all 2,500 stores within 90 days– The chain will continue the sale of tobacco products such as cigarettes, although they plan to expand the tobacco cessation section and reduce the visibility of the tobacco products in the stores.

America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) recommends changes to payment rates for Medicare Advantage plans– Currently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) decides the payments based on estimates for what a plan should cost in a specific region and the maximum payment that CMS will make. The trade group AHIP is urging CMS to include only the seniors who are enrolled in both Part A and Part B to ensure that the calculation does not include seniors who are not eligible for Medicare Advantage. The new formula would lead to an increase in Medicare Advantage payments.

Theranos receives five new patents in 2019 despite shutting down last year– The patents were filed in 2015 and 2016 and include a mechanism of collecting, testing, and transporting bodily fluids. The company was shut down last year, and its founder is facing fraud allegations and conspiracy charges.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides letter to three groups clarifying opioid guidelines– The CDC created the *Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain* last year. The American Society of Clinical Oncology, the American Society of Hematology, and the National Comprehensive Cancer Network notified the CDC that payers were denying reimbursement to their patients as a result of the guidelines. The CDC issued a letter to the groups clarifying that the guidelines were not meant to deny care to patients suffering from chronic pain.

Highlighted Healthcare Studies

1. Study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics* finds that suicidal behavior among teens and children visiting the emergency room doubled from 2007 to 2015.
2. Study in *JAMA Surgery* finds that female physicians who were also mothers and who had multiple domestic tasks were more likely to report career dissatisfaction than other physician females who had fewer responsibilities at home.
3. Study in *JAMA Pediatrics* finds that of the 150 teens that were killed due to domestic violence between 2003 and 2016, 90 percent were females. Four in five of the perpetrators were 18 years or older.
4. Study in *JAMA Internal Medicine* finds that nearly half of all teaching hospitals and rural hospitals experienced lower penalty rates in 2019 compared to 2018 due to changes in CMS’ Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program.
5. Study in *Advanced Science* finds that the human heart can be successfully engineered and printed with cells, blood vessels, ventricles and chambers using human cells.
6. Study in *Environmental Research* finds an association between shorter distance from major roadways and increased failure in verbal and nonverbal communication during childhood development.

California

Bill to allow nurse practitioners to provide care for patients without physician oversight advancing through California legislature– The bill received unanimous support in the Assembly Business and Professions Committee and will now be considered by the Appropriations Committee. Advocates believe this bill will help address the primary care physician shortage, especially for the aging population. Opponents, including the California Medical Association, say that nurse practitioners do not have the appropriate training and education to practice without supervision.

Other States

Tornados and floods hit several southern states during the weekend, resulting in deaths and injuries– Several states had power outages and road closures. At least eight people died in Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

South Carolina witnessed two hospital shootings in two days– The first shooting occurred in Regional Medical Center-Orangeburg's emergency department. A 23-year-old suspect opened fire and injured one employee. The next day, a 27-year-old visitor shot a police officer at Laurens County Memorial Hospital.

Pediatrician from Austin, Texas, begins program to help parents file taxes to promote better health– Dr. Michael Hole co-founded the program StreetCred that now operates in four states. Patients are informed about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) through which they can receive several thousand dollars. Dr. Hole sees this as a way to address the social determinants of health. In 2018, the program in Texas helped families earn nearly \$130,000 through tax credits.

Maryland looking to create a government-appointed prescription drug affordability board– Starting in 2020, the board's responsibilities would include setting limits on how much the state government should spend on high-cost prescription drugs. The proposal is receiving pushback from the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA).



Hepatitis A cases in Florida this year surpassed total number of cases in 2018– As of last week, there have been 745 cases, while the total number of cases in 2018 was 548. The total number of combined cases for 2014-2017 was 574. Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease; outbreaks tend to occur within populations where there is heavy drug use or homelessness. The Department of Health is advising people to get vaccinated.

Elder abuse cases rise in Minnesota, the only state that does not license assisted living facilities– An advocacy group sampled 128 cases of neglect and found that inadequate supervision, low staffing levels, and lack of communication within care teams were recurrent themes. The number of abuse cases has increased by 50 percent from 2012 to 2017.

New York City's Health Commissioner tells families not to have "measles parties"– The Commissioner has been warning families not to partake in "measles parties" which includes allowing their children to be infected with the disease as a way to immunize them naturally rather than vaccinating them. The city has already declared a public health emergency.

Illinois Medicaid to cover surgeries for qualifying transgender adults suffering from gender dysphoria– The Department of Healthcare and Family Services Director says the program will be modeled after the program in Vermont, and they expect the coverage to be cost-effective as it will help deter negative health problems such as depression and suicide.

Cuyahoga County in Ohio sees rise in preterm births and infant mortality– The infant mortality rate grew from 8.43 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 to 10.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in the first quarter of 2019. The typical gestation period is 39 to 41 weeks; 21 babies were born before 22 weeks gestation, and 85 percent of them were African American. The Board of Health's data analyst does not expect them to survive by the end of the year.

Surveys Highlight Issues with Healthcare Affordability

27%

Percentage of respondents with an annual household income of at least \$35,000 who reported delaying care due to healthcare costs according to a survey by AccessOne.

46%

Percentage of people who indicated that they would not be able to cover an emergency expense of \$400 without having to sell something or borrow money according to a Federal Reserve survey.

57%

Percentage of Americans who received a surprise bill and thought their insurance would cover it according to the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

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

Seattle school-based health clinic sent notes to parents of over 1,200 students asking them to get tested for HIV and hepatitis– The employees at the clinic skipped a step that involved sterilization of the dental equipment used for removing dental decay. The county's health department said the risk of infections is low.

Hunger as a Health Issue

California's nonprofit Caterina's Club served its 3 millionth meal this week– The organization has over 80 locations in Orange and Los Angeles Counties and serves around 5,000 children every day. The meals include a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, and protein.

Mental/ Behavioral Health

Half of child athletes struggle with mental health challenges– Around 12 percent of American athletes under the age of 18 struggle from depression. While exercise can help improve mental health, the stresses of the pressure to succeed and to acquire or keep athletic scholarships can contribute to anxiety and sleep deprivation. Adding therapists to athletic offices to increase awareness and provide care may help decrease the trend.

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