



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH

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# Healthcare News At A Glance

## National

**Office of Inspector General report finds Medicare Part D reimbursement costs for brand-name drugs increased while number of prescriptions decreased from 2011-2015**– The report indicates a 77 percent increase in Medicare Part D reimbursements and a 17 percent decrease in the number of prescriptions. The number of beneficiaries paying at least \$2,000 out-of-pocket annually on these medications increased by more than 100 percent. The report also suggested that per unit costs rose by 50 percent for nearly half of the brand-name drugs, resulting in an increase of \$12 billion Part D spending in the four-year span. Meanwhile, recent news stories uncovered that Medicare patients could save money by asking about the cash price from the pharmacists rather than using their insurance which may be more expensive.

**Target and Lowe's among some of the retailers to take measures to protect the public health before the federal government**– Even after reports of several deaths from methylene chloride and N-Methylpyrrolidone (NMP), found in paint strippers, the Environmental Protection Agency has not yet banned these chemicals. Lowe's announced last week that it will voluntarily remove these products from their shelves. Similarly, Target will be phasing out products that could impose health risks on consumers including ingredients like phthalates, butyl-paraben, and formaldehyde.

**New screening recommendations for colorectal cancer released**– The American Cancer Society encourages men and women get screened for colorectal cancers at the age of 45, 5 years earlier than the previous recommendation. They also recommend choosing from six screening tests, three which are at-home kits that test for blood stool. Colorectal cancer is the second highest cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States.

**The Community Oncology Alliance files lawsuit against the federal government**– The nonprofit is seeking to pause the 2 percent Medicare sequestration for Part B drugs, saying it violates the separation-of-powers. The group, consisting of over 5,000 oncologists, say the sequestration has led to increased costs and poor health outcomes, specifically for cancer patients.

## IHPL Data Watch

Using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we analyzed the number of births from 1997-2016 based on the age of the mother.

### Highlighted Observations (O) & Explanations (E)

**O:** In California, the rate at which women between the ages of 30-39 have children is growing faster than women of the same age group in the rest of the country. Additionally, the number of births by women 30-34 years surpassed the number of births by women 25-29 years in the state in 2016.

**E:** This is likely due to California's high cost of living that could influence women to wait and save before having a child.

## California

**The Fair Pricing for Dialysis Act heads to the November ballot**– With over 350,000 voter signatures validated, the issue will appear in the statewide ballot in November in efforts to increase investments in patient care. The Act limits dialysis corporation revenues to 15 percent above spending for patient care with all excess revenue to be refunded to either the 66,000 dialysis patients in California or insurers. While patients and advocates believe this proposition will improve patient care, technicians and nurses are afraid that cutting revenues will only make clinic conditions worse for both workers and patients.

**California providing needle-exchange programs with fentanyl testing strips**– With \$57,000 spent on providing fentanyl testing strips, the state is trying to get ahead of what some officials are expecting to be an impending outbreak of fentanyl-related deaths, particularly in the Hollywood region. Researchers at John's Hopkins University said the strips were accurate at determining the presence of fentanyl. A researcher at UC San Diego believes the sensitivity of the tests could cause people to ignore the results altogether after multiple "positive" results. Others are concerned about false negatives that could also lead to overdose.

**Los Angeles Services Authority released report showing 3 percent estimated reduction in people living without homes in Los Angeles**– The mayor of Los Angeles attributed this modest decrease to federal housing vouchers and city-funded rental subsidies. Other results from the study included: (1) a 16 percent reduction in the number of chronically homeless, (2) a 20 percent increase in *sheltered* homeless youth, (3) a 22 percent increase in homeless individuals over the age of 62, and (4) a decrease of 35 percent amongst black homeless individuals.

## Other States

**Supreme Court upholds Arkansas abortion restrictions as other states await court decisions for restrictive abortion laws**– Arkansas' new law requires physicians who choose to provide abortion pills to take responsibility for any complications. The physicians must also have admitting privileges at a hospital. Planned Parenthood has been unable to find physicians willing to provide abortion medications under these conditions. Meanwhile, Louisiana and Mississippi passed 15-week abortion bans that will go into effect once approved by a federal court. Iowa's law, which would ban abortion after the detection of a heartbeat, has been temporarily blocked by a state judge. The plaintiff in both cases, Planned Parenthood, alleges that all these laws are unconstitutional because fetuses cannot be considered viable at such a young age.

**Non-medical exemption rates for schoolchildren on the rise in Oregon**– In the past, lawmakers have passed tighter regulations for exemptions in efforts to increase immunization rates in schools. The Oregon Health Authority noted that more non-medical exemptions are being granted since 2013. All the while, immunization rates are declining, and Oregon has had multiple cases of whooping cough at schools and universities in the past year.

**New Jersey becomes the second state to impose an individual mandate for health insurance with penalties for residents who do not have it**– Following in the footsteps of Massachusetts, New Jersey hopes to withstand premium increases that are expected to arise from the repeal of the federal tax penalty. The state will also provide reinsurance to help care for the sickest patients.

**New York City proposes adding a third gender category, "X," for birth certificates**– California, Washington, and Oregon all provide a third gender category on birth certificates and New York City hopes to do the same. In order to pass, the proposal will have to go through multiple hearings and a final vote in September. The city's health commissioner believes that this will be a step forward to preserving the dignity of transgender New Yorkers.

**Children held in mental health facilities despite getting clearance to leave**– A ProPublica Illinois investigation found that children are being kept in psychiatric hospitals for months despite receiving clearance; welfare agencies are unable to place them in foster homes or residential treatment centers that could allow them to attend school and lead normal lives. Lack of funding and inappropriate staffing issues contribute to the problem. The American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois says that mismanagement may also be an issue.

**Wisconsin report finds that Milwaukee closed 90 percent of cases related to lead poisoning before children's blood lead levels dropped to "safe" levels**– The report indicates that investigators did not perform risk assessments in more than one-quarter of the cases and some children presented with toxic levels. Additionally, the report criticized the city's inadequate intervention strategy.

## Healthcare Polling

### 51 %

of older adults have set up a patient portal.

The University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy polled 2,000 adults between the ages of 50 and 80 to understand the perception of health information technology amongst older patients. A majority set up portals to view test results (84 percent).

### 59 %

of physicians want different electronic health record systems.

Stanford Medicine polled over 500 primary care physicians to understand the impacts of EHR on physician's work satisfaction. More than half of the responders said the EHR leads to dissatisfaction and 71 percent reported that it leads to physician burnout. Nearly three-quarters think there are too many inefficiencies.

### 66 %

of Americans report feeling stressed due to health insurance costs.

The Harris Poll and American Psychological Association polled over 3,400 adults to understand their views on health insurance. Nearly 70 percent of people with household incomes over \$50,000 and 64 percent of people with household incomes below \$50,000 were stressed by health insurance costs.

## 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

**Researchers in the UK find that tooth enamel can be regenerated using a specific protein material**– It was previously believed that tooth enamel, the hard outer tissue of our teeth that acts as a primary barrier to acidity and temperature, could not be regenerated. Researchers have found that a protein material can help guide dental enamel development. The research shows promise for other applications of regenerative medicine, such as bone regeneration.

### Hunger as a Health Issue

**Hunger Season will come early and hit Sudan hard this year**– The civil war has led to mass destruction of agricultural land and skyrocketing prices of food. Human Rights groups and health officials believe that millions will be affected by acute malnutrition. Food distribution and other aid have been difficult to provide as workers are constantly targeted and attacked. The United Nations declared this the largest refugee crisis in Africa since the Rwandan genocide.

### Mental/ Behavioral Health

**Chicago prisons using mental health screening to try and provide criminals with adequate medications**– Prisons and jails in the United States are becoming some of the largest mental health institutions. The problem is, they are not equipped to deal with mental illnesses. Some jails and prisons have taken to screening every prisoner for mental health illness and providing medications or separate cells for prisoners who may be at risk for self-harm.