



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH

Institute for Health Policy and Leadership

# Healthcare News At A Glance



## National

### Reimbursement rates to rise for Medicare Advantage Plans

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released a statement that it will increase reimbursement rates by 3.4 percent for the private plans; these cover more than 21.4 million people (65+).

### Application users' HIV status information accessible to third parties

Facebook was not the only popular application under fire last week as it was revealed that the Grindr application (app), a same-sex dating app, was selling self-reported information about using pre-exposure prophylaxis treatment to third-party companies which then combined it with the users' GPS locations to determine whether or not the user is HIV positive.

### Study indicates that medical marijuana availability could have a protective effect against the opioid epidemic

Published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, one study found that states that allowed medical marijuana access had a 14 percent reduction in opioid prescriptions amongst Medicare enrollees. Another *JAMA* study noted similar correlations amongst Medicaid enrollees. Critics warn about the repercussions of considering marijuana as a harm-reduction technique.

### Welcome Advocate Aurora Health, the new not-for-profit hospital system

With 27 hospitals and an annual revenue of \$11 billion, the new Advocate Aurora Health hospital system is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest in the country. The merger between Advocate Health Care in Illinois and Wisconsin's Aurora Health Care occurred relatively smoothly compared to last year's failed merger between NorthShore University HealthSystem and Advocate.

### To lower drug prices, Health and Human Services Secretary enlists help of CVS executive

Alex Azar hired Daniel Best to be his senior adviser in reforming drug pricing. Best previously worked for Pfizer and helped develop CVSHealth's prescription drug plans.

## A Brief History of America's Opioid Epidemic (1995-now)

- 1995:** Pain becomes a fifth vital sign.
- 1996:** Purdue Pharma introduces OxyContin.
- 1998:** Promotional video releases in which doctors discuss the benefits of opioids.
- 2001:** The hospital accrediting agency, the Joint Commission (TJC), begins rating hospitals on pain treatment satisfaction for patients.
- 2004:** The Federation of State Medical Boards endorses penalizing physicians who don't adequately treat pain.
- 2009:** TJC removes pain assessment requirements.
- 2010:** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) provides addiction treatment coverage as authorities begin finding strong heroin imported from Mexico.
- 2012:** Lawmakers change the discussion from one of individual failure to one of an epidemic that requires society's help.
- 2013:** Fentanyl floods in from China.
- 2016:** Reports from the CDC prompts Congress to pass a \$1 billion bill to focus on treating the epidemic that has killed 42,000 Americans this year.
- 2017:** The President declares a state of emergency as the drug overdose death toll in Ohio spikes. States file lawsuits against major pharmaceutical companies that they believe fueled the epidemic.
- 2018:** President Trump releases a plan that includes cracking down on drug dealers. The federal budget includes \$4.6 billion for combating the epidemic.

## A Noteworthy Talk

Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy and world-renowned bioethicist Atul Gawande gave a talk during a Brigham and Women's Hospital event. The theme was the opioid epidemic and the two physicians discussed how the problem came to be, recent statistics, and how to move forward. Dr. Murthy said that opioid prescription should be limited and that they do not work for chronic pain. The two discussed the effects of stigma and the effectiveness of medication-assisted treatment.

## California

**Attorney General (AG) Xavier Becerra takes action against large health system in Northern California**– In light of last week's Berkeley study, California's AG filed a lawsuit against the 24-hospital system Sutter Health saying that it has been overcharging through non-competitive tactics.

**California's Starbucks must display cancer warning according to a judge**– State law requires businesses to provide warnings to customers regarding the chemicals they use and their potentially adverse effects. A Superior Court judge ruled that because brewing coffee yields acrylamide, a weak carcinogen, Starbucks must warn customers about the potential cancer risks.

**A new California bill takes aim at addiction treatment centers that make millions from false medical claims**– Reports show that insurance brokers were persuading patients to take up private insurance plans and were later splitting the profits from expensive treatments with treatment centers. The bill aims to bring transparency to the profits made by dialysis clinics and addiction treatment centers and requires centers to inform eligible individuals about Medi-Cal.



## Other States

**Iowa governor signs bill allowing non-ACA health plans**– The lower-cost plans will be provided by Farm Bureau and Wellmark as well as other associations and will not be required to adhere to any mandates under the ACA. Based on the individual stories of Iowan business owners who went bankrupt or lost their health insurance, Governor Kim Reynolds (R-IA) believes that the benefits of offering cheaper health insurance will outweigh the risks.

**Global capitation working for some but not all hospitals in Maryland**– Last week, a study was released showing substantial effects in savings and health outcomes for Maryland hospitals under the state's global capitation model. A new study in *Health Affairs* indicates that for rural hospitals, there was virtually no change in spending or length of hospital stay.

**Maine voters approved Medicaid expansion, but Governor is not budging**– Governor Paul LePage (R-ME) has stated that the money for the expansion will not come from raising taxes. As the deadline for filing for the \$500 million expansion looms near, health care advocates are getting ready to take action.

**Massachusetts passes the Protecting Access to Confidential Health Care (PATCH) Act requiring hospitals to send patients "explanation of benefits"**– After years of discussion, the bill was finally passed last week by Governor Charlie Baker (R-MA). The bill requires statements of the treatments provided and their costs to be sent directly to adult patients, not to the insurance policyholders. This will protect the privacy of patients who do not wish to disclose information about their visits to family members under the same insurance plan.

**Minneapolis police learn to administer Narcan**– Narcan, also known as naloxone, is a drug that reverses the respiratory depression caused by opioid overdoses. The city plans to train all officers by the end of the year after receiving reports that the number of overdoses is already increasing.

**Ohio county asks CDC for help with increasing adolescent suicide crisis** – The CDC is investigating this recent outbreak in which 5 students committed suicide over the past 6-months in Stark County. Last year, the CDC launched a similar investigation in Santa Clara County and found that common risk factors, including mental health illnesses and traumatic events, were being triggered by academic stress. This led to the districts shutting down morning classes.

## Kaiser's Healthcare-Related Poll This Week

**20%**

Percentage of Americans who acquired health insurance but did not know that the individual mandate had been repealed.

**61%**

Percentage of Americans who are "satisfied" with their health insurance.

**90%**

Percentage of Americans who reported that they would buy their insurance regardless of the fact that there will no longer be a penalty for not having health insurance in 2019.

## 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

**Research indicates that diabetics may not be receiving proper oral health care**– Researchers have found that despite evidence that diabetes increases the risk for gum diseases, people with diabetes and pre-diabetes are the least likely to visit their dentist.

Hunger as  
a Health  
Issue

**Study finds that home deliveries of food for food insecure households leads to reduction in emergency department (ED) visits**– The findings indicated cost savings of anywhere from \$10 (free food and delivery) to \$220 per individual per month and a 70 percent reduction in ED visits for dually enrolled (Medicare and Medicaid) individuals.

Mental/  
Behavioral  
Health

**Educated, black women still experience high rates of infant mortality, most likely due to stress from discrimination**– Dr. Bentley-Edwards, a professor of general internal medicine at Duke University, argues that education does not have the same protective effect against infant mortality for black women as it does for white women. While infant mortality rates have been decreasing for all races, there are still racial disparities that indicate a need for policies and social groups.