$867 billion bipartisan farm bill passes Congress—The new farm bill is now awaiting the signature of the president. The bill includes subsidies for farmers and legalizes the growth and sales of hemp. It rejects work requirements for receiving benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and includes grants to subsidize community-oriented programs that connect small and mid-size farmers with the community through education and innovation. Additionally, there is a refinancing option through lower-interest loans for rural hospitals through the Department of Agriculture. Funding incentives for farmers to try environmentally-friendly practices have been cut.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirms that fentanyl is involved in most drug overdose—From 2013 to 2016, opioid-related drug overdoses increased by more than 100 percent. A CDC report shows that in 2016, fentanyl was involved in roughly one-third of the drug overdose deaths compared to four percent in 2011. Over the same time, the share of fatal heroin overdoses increased by 14 percentage points.

Attorneys General from multiple states begin appeal process for Texas federal judge ruling that Affordable Care Act (ACA) individual mandate is unconstitutional—Last week, a federal judge declared that the ACA’s individual mandate was unconstitutional because the federal tax penalty was no longer in place. The effort was led by Texas and included 19 other states. California and more than 15 other states have requested the judge to clarify that the ACA is still in place. This will create the opportunity for the attorneys to appeal the decision.

United States (US) was the only nation to vote against United Nation General Assembly sexual harassment resolution—The US President’s administration argued that references to “sexual and reproductive health” were promoting abortion rights. The US was one of two countries to vote against the child marriage resolution for the same reason.

Highlighted Studies of the Week
1. Study from BMJ found that in Canada compared to patients discharged in November and January, patients discharged during the holiday season had an extra 483 emergency department visits and 26 more deaths per 100,000 patients discharged.
2. Study from the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics found that child abuse cases increased from 0.2 to 0.6 cases per 100,000 children on Saturdays after report cards were released compared to other Saturdays.
3. Study from CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians found a link between obesity and a higher risk of 13 cancers; the study found that in 2012, 3.9 percent of cancer cases worldwide was attributed to excess weight.
4. Study from New England Journal of Medicine showed a 15 percent reduction in mortality rates, and a three-year longer lifespan, for men diagnosed with prostate cancer before 65 years of age and treated with radical surgery compared to those who were assigned to “watchful-waiting.”

Kroger Rx Savings Club
The grocery store chain is now offering pharmacy customers discounted prices on medications for an annual fee of $36 per person in over 2,000 pharmacies around the country. Twenty-one drugs will be completely free and hundreds others will cost between $6 to $12 for a three-month supply.
Many victims of the Camp Fire were elderly or had disabilities— The average age of the victims named from the Camp Fire is 71 years. Most of the victims that the officials identified either lacked the cognitive abilities to understand what was happening and how to escape or they refused to leave. Most of the senior homes were able to get their residents out, owing much of that success to their evacuation plans. In recent years, cities began including an assessment of those with special needs in their emergency response plans; the rate of residents with disability in the town of Paradise is three times greater than the rest of California.

Survey indicates Californians are mainly focused on health care and community colleges as areas to spend the anticipated budget surplus— The state currently has $14.5 billion in reserves and is expected to have a surplus of $14.8 billion in the 2019-2020 fiscal year. The Public Policy Institute of California found that a majority of the respondents in their survey believe the money should be put towards education and health care. The Governor-elect is expected to submit a budget proposal within the first weeks of the new year.

US attorney general takes up lawsuit against Sacramento-based Sutter Health— The Justice Department is joining the lawsuit along with a whistleblower who alleged that Sutter Health was knowingly submitting inaccurate diagnosis codes for Medicare Advantage patients in order to assign them with a higher risk score, which would lead to higher reimbursement.

Physician who is also a Congressman-elect in Tennessee says vaccines cause autism— Mark Green, the new Congressman-elect, says he will request the data from the CDC and analyze it himself as he believes the data has been “fraudulently managed.” The CDC stands firm on its conclusion that vaccines do not cause autism. The day after the statements, the chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Senator Alexander tweeted “Vaccines save lives” and the Tennessee Department of Health issued a statement that vaccines do not cause autism.

Schools in Seattle, Washington see improved test scores two years after pushing the start time by one hour forward— In 2016, the schools implemented a later start time from 7:50 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. The community worked together to reschedule extracurriculars and bus routes. The University of Washington was studying the students before and after and found that students had an average of an additional 34 minutes of sleep, saw a 4.5 percent increase in final grades, and had a significant decrease in absences.

Springfield, Missouri police chief will launch review into cases in which rape kits were destroyed— A CNN investigation uncovered that 108 rape kits had been destroyed in the department prior to the expiration of the statute of limitation and three-quarters of them were for cases from 2014 that were never submitted for lab testing. Victims were given short timelines for responding and were made to sign waivers that prohibited them from prosecuting before their report investigations were concluded. The chief publicly apologized and reported that he is working with community resources to reach out to the victims. Leaders in other states are now directing their law enforcement to ensure that rape kits are not being prematurely destroyed.

Flooding caused by hurricanes in North Carolina and other Southeast states may have caused contamination of well water— Most states in the US do not require private well water to be tested for harmful contaminants. This has become a concern for states in the Southeast that were hit with major hurricanes early this year because the floodwater may be contaminated and there is no preliminary data to establish a baseline to track contamination. The states are offering free well water testing through their public health departments but less than one thousand opted for it in each state. Officials at the departments believe that more 640,000 wells may be contaminated from agricultural runoff or resident of coal-fired power plants.
Healthcare Surveys and Reports of the week

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<th>United Health Foundation</th>
<th>Associated Press (AP)</th>
<th>Pew Research Center</th>
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<td>The foundation’s report finds that the United States had the highest obesity rate in 2018, exceeding 30 percent of the population. The rate increased five percent since last year.</td>
<td>Using the National Center for Health Statistics data, AP found that life expectancy decreased by 1.5 years for every ten percentage point increase in unemployment in a neighborhood.</td>
<td>The center found that Americans who were living in the West North Central census region (KS, MN, ND, SD, NE, MO) had an average of 4.4 more minutes of travel time to the hospital compared to those living in the Pacific region.</td>
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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**

Last week, the federal Action for Dental Health Act was signed into law—The Act created federal grants to support organizations that will improve access to coverage of oral health care through education, disease prevention, and the establishment of dental homes. The Act also expands the use of grants to pay for oral health care. Meanwhile, the Surgeon General is working on a Surgeon General Report focused on oral health.

**Hunger as a Health Issue**

Albany, New York’s Credit Union SEFCU donates $500,000 to end hunger in the region—More than half of the money will go to 40 non-profit organizations that are focused on alleviating hunger. Over $100,000 will be used for the purchase of a shuttle that will deliver fresh food from a new SEFCU farm. The farm is hydroponic which means that the plants are grown in a water-based, mineral nutrient solution rather than soil.

**Mental/Behavioral Health**

Harvard Business Review (HBR) article discusses ways that companies can address mental health of employees—The article highlights three key strategies: creating a culture of importance and focus on mental health, providing training, education, and awareness, and compiling and distributing a list of online resources for employees to use.