



Health Policy Briefing

August 17, 2015

NIH Finds 18 Percent of Adults Experience Notable Pain

There are 40 million adults in the United States who have reported experiencing a high level of pain, according to a new analysis from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The data is drawn from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The 18 percent of adults who reported experiencing severe levels of pain were found to be more likely to have a worse health status, use more health care, and suffer from more disability than those with less severe pain. In addition, an estimated 25.3 million people – 11.2 percent of the adult population – reported feeling pain every day for the three months preceding their response, while 126 million adults -- 55.6 percent – reported some type of pain in the three months prior to the survey. These findings are significant as policymakers work to address the epidemic of prescription painkiller abuse. In his fiscal year 2016 budget, the President requested \$100 million to reduce opioid and heroin use.

Pew Examines the Doctor Shortage Across the Country

Last week, Pew Charitable Trusts published an in depth examination of the shortage of state medical residency programs. This shortage can force graduating doctors to leave the state in which they studied, even if they would prefer to stay and practice medicine. This issue is especially prevalent in states like Iowa, Missouri, and Tennessee, because they graduate more medical students than they have residency slots. Larger states like New York, California, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, however, tend to train more residents than they graduate. The research focuses on the importance of not only supporting medical schools, but also investing in residency programs in order to increase the numbers of doctors practicing within a state's borders.

Inside

- [GAO Uncovers Medicaid Prescription Drug Fraud.....2](#)
- [UrbanInstituteProposesACAChanges.....2](#)
- [Uninsured Rates Across the Country Continue to Drop.....2](#)
- [Upcoming Congressional Meetings and Hearings.....2](#)

Medicare and Medicaid News

GAO Uncovers Medicaid Prescription Drug Fraud

According to a new [report](#) from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), over 16,000 Medicaid beneficiaries may have engaged in ‘doctor shopping,’ or visiting five or more physicians for prescriptions for antipsychotics or respiratory medications amounting to \$33 million. Furthermore, 700 beneficiaries received more than a one-year supply of the same drug at a cost of \$1.6 million to the Medicaid program. The GAO reports that this is an indicator of diversion, or the redirection of prescription medication for illegitimate purposes. The report draws on data from Arizona, Florida, Michigan, and New Jersey from 2011, the most-recent year for which reliable data is available. GAO recommends that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) consider lock-in programs for non-controlled substances, which would restrict beneficiaries who have abused the program to one health-care provider, one pharmacy, or both. GAO also suggests CMS look into the prohibition of automatic refills, which would reduce the potential for stockpiling.

Affordable Care Act Update

Urban Institute Proposes ACA Changes

The Urban Institute has released a new [paper](#) recommending changes to address the affordability and access challenges that continue to face the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The proposed changes for the future include altering the premium tax credit schedule and tying subsidies to gold plans sold on the exchanges instead of silver plans in order to reduce the average cost-sharing requirements per household. The report also recommends a change to allow family members to use subsidies to purchase insurance in the marketplace if employer insurance coverage for the family, and not just the individual employee, is deemed unaffordable. Additionally, the researchers suggest increasing federal grants for IT development and operations, consumer outreach and enrollment, and enforcement of regulations. The proposed changes would be paid for in part through increasing the Medicare payroll tax, the extension of Medicaid drug rebates to Medicare, and a cap on the tax exclusion for contributions to employer-based health insurance.

Uninsured Rates Across the Country Continue to Drop

There has been a statistically significant drop in the uninsured rate for most states since the 2010 health care law took effect at the beginning of 2014, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. Arkansas and Kentucky have seen the sharpest reductions in their uninsured rate, while Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington all experienced at least a 10-percentage point reduction in their number of uninsured residents. Of the top 10 states with the greatest reductions in uninsured rates, seven expanded their Medicaid programs. Collectively, Gallup finds that the data indicates that uninsured rates in states who chose to expand Medicaid and set up their own health exchanges or form a state-federal partnership marketplace declined significantly more than the uninsured rates in states that did not chose to embrace these parts of the law.

Upcoming Congressional Meetings and Hearings

House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health: field hearing titled “Realizing Quality Rural Care Through Appropriate Staffing and Improved Choice;” 10:00 a.m., National Guard Armory, 1170 East Portage Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.; September 1