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Information for eNews is compiled from several sources, including websites and lists from the *Wheeler Report*, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Kaiser Family Foundation, Commonwealth Fund, *Milbank Quarterly*, *Health Affairs*, Urban Institute, *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, Wispolitics.com, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, *The New York Times*, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *Milwaukee Business Journal*, *Wisconsin State Journal*, Wisconsin Technology Network and others.

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STATE NEWS

[WI Health Insurance Plans Now Required to Offer Coverage for Dependents up to Age 27](#)

Beginning in January 2010, young adults up to 27 years old will be able to receive coverage on their parents' health insurance plan. However, the provision does not apply to private companies with self-insured plans.

[Wisconsin Strengthens Cobra Benefits](#)

The federal COBRA subsidy created by the economic stimulus bill was recently strengthened by the WI Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI). On Oct. 1, OCI issued an emergency rule requiring insurers to continue group health insurance coverage for laid-off employees and their families, even when their former employer goes out of business or otherwise discontinues group health coverage. This rule also sustains access to the federal 65% premium subsidy for COBRA.

[Issue Brief Describes Early Findings from an Evaluation of WI's BadgerCare Plus](#)

Wisconsin's BadgerCare Plus is receiving increased attention from health reformers around the country. The program's enrollment success holds important lessons about program design for those involved in health reform at both the state and national level. The RWJF brief finds that substantial increases in enrollment can be achieved by designing programs with key elements.

[Child Wellness and Prevention Program Started in Milwaukee](#)

Project LAUNCH to Expand and Enhance Wellness Services for Young Children and Families began in October. Wisconsin was one of twelve states to receive a Project LAUNCH grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), which provides grants in the amount of \$850,000 each year. Wisconsin's Project LAUNCH grant began October 1, 2009 and will be available for the next five years through 2014.

SAMHSA Awards more than \$2.5 Million for Statewide Consumer Network Grants

The award supports consumer organizations in their work to improve mental health services for persons living with serious mental illnesses. Grassroots Empowerment Project Inc. in WI was one recipient.

77,300 Wisconsinites Lost Health Coverage in 2009 Due to Increased Unemployment

Approximately 77,300 people in Wisconsin lost health insurance coverage in 2009 due to a rise in unemployment, according to a report issued today by the health consumer organization Families USA. According to the report, the state's average unemployment rate in 2008 was 4.7 percent, while the average rate this year was 8.5 percent, thereby resulting in losses of health coverage.

Children's Dental Program Gets Boost to Help Prevent Decay

The Department of Health Services will receive \$275,000 each year for the next three years from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to support the Seal-A-Smile program. In addition to the HRSA funds, Delta Dental of Wisconsin will be donating \$240,000 per year for the next two years. This totals \$1.3 million in new grants for the Seal-A-Smile program.

Wisconsin Moves Ahead With Medical Homes Initiative

Wisconsin has become the 32nd state to pilot patient centered medical home care in the Medicaid population. That became the case when Gov. Jim Doyle signed the 2009-11 state budget, which included a requirement that the Department of Health Services develop a PCMH pilot for the state's Medicaid population.

Bill Proposed in WI Would Help Increase Volunteers at Free Health Care Clinics

For many people with no health insurance and unable to afford out-of-pocket costs, free clinics are the only option for medical or dental care. Senate Bill 80 and AB 44 would add working providers to retired providers as "agents of the state" when they provide care as volunteers at a free clinic. The bills are designed to help increase the number of doctors and other health care professionals that volunteer at Free Health Care Clinics around the state.

Bill Proposed to Restore Anti-Smoking Funds Previously Cut

Although Wisconsin taxpayers are paying more for cigarettes, programs aimed at curbing smoking are getting cut. A bill moving through the legislature would restore some of the funding to tobacco-related programs like the statewide Quit Line.

Study Focuses on Improving Dental Health in Wisconsin

A \$200,000 study approved by a state commission will attempt to find a solution to the critical shortage of dentists and dental hygienists in rural and northern Wisconsin.

Mental Health Parity Bill Receives Hearing in Legislature

SB 362/AB512, companion mental health parity bills received hearing in the state capitol in late October. Details about the bills and the hearings area available at <http://parityforwisconsin.org/>

WI Hospital Association Voices Opposition to "Robust" Public Option

The Wisconsin Hospital Association has expressed its continued opposition to the public option contemplated in current house bills. In a letter sent last week to the Wisconsin Congressional

Delegation, WHA President Steve Brenton outlined its impact on Wisconsin hospitals. “We have modeled the annual impact on our hospitals (PPS hospitals only) of a Public Program based on Medicare rates and found a \$1.1 billion annual loss if just 1/3 of the current commercially-insured population migrates to a government-sponsored option that pays Medicare rates,” Brenton wrote. “[This is] a conservative estimate given the ‘competitive’ advantage such a plan would have over commercial plans that must negotiate payment rates with provider networks.”

[BadgerCare Plus Core Plan Enrollment for Adults without Dependent Children Suspended](#)

October 9th was the last day to enroll in the low-income health insurance plan for adults without dependent children. Anyone who applies after that date will be placed on a waiting list. [Core Plan applications surged in the final days before enrollment was suspended.](#) BadgerCare Plus for children and families is still taking applications and enrolling new members.

[Legal Immigrants Gain Expanded Access to BadgerCare Plus](#)

Wisconsin is beginning to implement the provision in the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) that allows states to get federal matching funds for extending health insurance to certain "lawfully residing" immigrant children and pregnant immigrants. Those children and women will no longer have to reside in the U.S. for 5 years before they are eligible for subsidized coverage.

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families has prepared or updated several papers explaining the implications of the removal of the 5-year bar:

[Sorting Out Which Immigrant Groups Are Eligible for BadgerCare Plus](#)

[Improving Health Care for Pregnant Immigrants in Wisconsin](#)

[Immigrants and BadgerCare Plus](#)

[Medicaid/BadgerCare Implement Further Simplifications](#)

Wisconsin DHS has made changes in Medicaid and BC+ aimed at meeting two of the standards for a performance bonus under the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA): 1) [Eliminated remaining asset test for kids](#) - Although BC+ never had an asset test, there was still an asset test in Medicaid in a few circumstances relating to children with disabilities or in institutions, and 2) [premium assistance voluntary](#) - Premium assistance (HIPP) had previously been required when it was more cost-effective for the state to subsidize employer sponsored insurance for an individual or family, rather than providing regular BC+ coverage.

RESEARCH AND PROGRAM TOOLS

New Resources from [Evidence-Based Health Policy Project](#)

- Materials from [October 8 briefing](#): "Health Care Quality, Effectiveness, and Value: How Might State of Wisconsin Investments Pay Off?"

New and Updated Resources from the Commonwealth Fund

- [Health Care Quality in U.S. Not Improving, NCQA Says](#)
- [A new report compares three pending Congressional health reform bills.](#)
- [Incremental Cost Estimates for the Patient-Centered Medical Home](#)
- [Results from a State Scorecard on Health System Performance, 2009](#)

New and Updated Resources from the Kaiser Family Foundation

- [Fact Sheet: Updated Women's Health Insurance Coverage, including state by state data](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Health Insurance Coverage of Women Ages 18 to 64, by State, 2007–2008](#)
- [Briefing Examined Health Reform, Long-Term Care and the CLASS Act](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Medicaid Beneficiaries' Access to Care](#)
- [Poll Finds that Public Support For Health Reform is Unchanged in October With More in Favor Than Opposed](#)
- [Report: Results from a 50-State Medicaid Budget Survey for State FYs 2009 and 2010](#)
- [New Data on Demographic Characteristics by State](#)
- [New Data on Health Insurance Status in Key Populations](#)

Insurance Coverage by Congressional Districts, 2008

Urban Institute report “Variation in Insurance Coverage Across Congressional Districts New Estimates from 2008” examines the number of uninsured by Congressional district, finding wide variation.

"How Will the Uninsured be Affected by Health Reform?"

A four-part Urban Institute series examines how many non-elderly uninsured people could gain coverage through health reform.

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Monday Population Health Seminar Series

12:00 - 1:00 PM, Room 1309 HSLC

Fall 2009 Scientific Writing Workshop

November 18th and 19th, 2009, 8:00am-4:00pm, Waisman Center, Fee: \$150 (both days)

Life Course Outcomes of Adolescents With Low IQs

November 12th, 12:15-1:30pm, 8417 Sewell Social Sciences

READING ROOM

6 Million U.S. Kids Lack Enough Vitamin D

While the optimal amount of vitamin D is still subject to debate, a new study finds that over 6 million American children are getting too little of this essential nutrient. Researchers found that 6.3 million U.S. children -- almost one in 5 -- were at less than the recommended 50 nmol/L level of vitamin D.

IOM Recommendations to Revise School Meal Standards

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) released their recommendations for new nutrition standards to make school meals more healthful in the report, *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*. Regulations for school nutrition standards and meal requirements set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have not been changed since 1995.

Weight Loss "Maintainers" Have Fewer TVs at Home

A new study suggests predictable factors like exercise and control over eating play a role, but so do factors in the home like fewer TVs and more exercise equipment. Authors conclude that obesity treatment should focus on increasing conscious control over eating, engaging in physical activity, and reducing disinhibition. Changes in the home environment may help facilitate these behavioral changes.

Cocoa in Chocolate May Be Good for the Heart

A new randomized controlled trial on people with a high risk of cardiovascular disease shows that cocoa reduces inflammation associated with heart disease.

Report Reveals Economic Burden of Health Disparities in the United States

The analysis Found:

- Between 2003 and 2006 the combined costs of health inequalities and premature death in the United States were \$1.24 trillion.
- Eliminating health disparities for minorities would have reduced direct medical care expenditures by \$229.4 billion for the years 2003-2006.
- Between 2003 and 2006, 30.6% of direct medical care expenditures for African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics were excess costs due to health inequalities.
- Eliminating health inequalities for minorities would have reduced indirect costs associated with illness and premature death by more than one trillion dollars between 2003 and 2006.

Policy Brief: Pros and Cons of Congress' Proposed Changes to the Insurance Market

A new Health Policy Brief from *Health Affairs* and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation examines these proposed market reforms and new consumer protection measures. The provisions have won unprecedented support from both consumer advocates and, with some qualifications, from insurance industry leaders. But insurers remain concerned that inadequate penalties for enforcing a mandate on individuals to purchase coverage could keep millions uninsured. That, they say, could spur "adverse selection," in which only the sickest people would sign up for coverage, and would defeat the entire premise of insurance market reform.

Heart Failure Drug Guidelines Often Ignored

Most hospitalized heart failure patients are sent home without widely recommended inexpensive pills, despite a program to get more doctors to follow treatment guidelines, a study suggests. The pills studied have been shown to reduce hospitalizations and deaths. But they also can be hard on the kidneys and when used in the wrong patients, side effects can be deadly — another reason some doctors may avoid them.

Safety Benefits of Booster Seats Affirmed

Study reconfirms previous reports that Belt-Positioning Booster [BPB] Seats reduce the risk for injury in children aged 4 through 8 years. On the basis of these analyses, researchers recommend that parents, pediatricians, and health educators continue to recommend BPB seats as best practice once a child outgrows a harness-based child restraint until he or she is at least 8 years of age.

Smoking Bans Reduce Heart Attacks and Disease

The report, issued by the Institute of Medicine, concluded that exposure to secondhand smoke significantly increased the risk of a heart attack among both smokers and nonsmokers. The panel also said it found that a reduction in heart problems began fairly quickly after a smoking ban was instituted and that exposure to low or fleeting levels of secondhand smoke could cause cardiovascular problems.

GAO Report: Children's Access to Dental Services

A new report by the Government Accountability Office investigates (1) state strategies to monitor and improve access to dental care for children in Medicaid and (2) CMS actions since 2007 to improve oversight of Medicaid dental services for children.