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STATE NEWS

Wisconsin Drops in National Health Rankings

A national survey puts Wisconsin at No. 18, down seven places from a 2009 report. Wisconsin is losing ground in [national health rankings](#), dropping from 11th place overall in 2009 to 18th place in 2010, according to a long-running annual report on national health recently released. The state ranked seventh when the annual rankings began in 1990.

Wisconsin to Fight Health Reform Law

Governor-elect Scott Walker plans to authorize Wisconsin to challenge the constitutionality of the [federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act \(ACA\)](#). Wisconsin Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen has not decided whether the state will join the lawsuit filed in Florida by 20 other states, the National Federation of Independent Business and two uninsured individuals, or file its own lawsuit. The key issue in the legal challenges is whether the federal government can require people to buy health insurance or fine them for failing to do so. That requirement is considered essential if health insurers must cover people with pre-existing health problems.

Governor Elect Seeks Flexibility, 'Free-Market' Approach for Health Care Law

Governor-elect Scott Walker met with President Obama and signaled willingness to implement some aspects of the ACA, particularly the exchanges, by using a "free-market" approach. In an interview [and letter to the president](#), Walker said he would work within the law if it is upheld.

Wisconsin Receives Two Awards for Healthcare Program

Wisconsin's BadgerCare Plus program received a national "Innovation" award recently from the Council on State Government (CSG) and its ACCESS self-service web portal received an honorable mention in the Stockholm Challenge, an international award program for projects using information and communication technology to improve people's lives. Wisconsin was one of eight states to receive recognition from CSG for an innovative program, BadgerCare Plus, that can be transferred successfully to another state.

BadgerCare, Federal Health Care Law in Jeopardy?

For years, Wisconsin has expanded services and Medicaid coverage far beyond federal requirements under Democratic and Republican governors alike. But in the face of a budget deficit that could top \$3 billion over the next two years, Republican leaders say everything needs to be on the table for cuts — including the 9 percent of the budget that goes toward Medical Assistance programs.

Governor-Elect Call for Pause; Leg Council Proceeds Cautiously on Health Reform

Since the election, Governor-elect Walker and Republican legislators have called for a pause in consideration toward developing exchanges. The Legislative Council Study Committee on Health Care Reform Implementation met, following the November elections and turnover of control to Republican leadership, to continue forging its recommendations regarding establishment of insurance purchasing exchanges. The Committee was able to agree to on three themes:

- A pluralistic model that maintains a robust private insurance market.

- An exchange that is non-governmental and politically insulated with safeguards for transparency and public accountability.
- An exchange that focuses on promoting value with an emphasis on improving quality, access and prevention.

As well, the Wisconsin Hospital Association has submitted its own [Guiding Principles](#) around establishment of the exchanges.

Fewer Employers Offer Insurance

Wisconsin has shown a clear, downward trend in employer-sponsored health insurance over the past decade, according to a study from the Center on Wisconsin Strategy. The total number of adults with employer-sponsored insurance fell by 9 percent, or 318,000 people, from 2000 to 2009.

DHS: BadgerCare Plus Lessened the Recession's Effects on Insurance Coverage

2009 was a difficult and unusual year in the United States and around the world. The deepest economic recession our nation has ever experienced took a toll on Wisconsin residents. At the same time, a major expansion of the BadgerCare Plus health insurance program provided health care for more low-income children and adults across the state. The effects of these two forces at work in Wisconsin are reflected in the report, [Wisconsin Health Insurance Coverage, 2009](#).

WCCF: BadgerCare Plus: Responds to Growing Need, Requires Smart Budget Solutions

The Great Recession has accelerated a long trend in the decline of employer-sponsored insurance in Wisconsin and across the nation. This article examines the growth in Wisconsin's Medicaid-related programs during the recession, the challenge the state faces in financing those programs in the 2011-13 biennium, and the potential fiscal relief available in 2014 from the Affordable Care Act.

Leg Council Committee on Workforce/Access Develops Rebates Recommendations

The [staff memo outlines a range of possible options](#) for committee considerations, including a third medical school, addition workforce surveys, increasing resident positions for physicians and nurses, increasing payment and expanded scopes of practices for several professions. Several other and contrary recommendations were submitted by members and the public.

Security Health Plan: 5 Stars from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid

Security Health Plan of Wisconsin, Inc., a health maintenance organization sponsored by Marshfield Clinic, is among only three health plans in the nation to receive a 5-star rating — the highest possible — from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for its Advocare Medicare Advantage plans. The ratings, now available at www.medicare.gov, target a broad array of clinical quality, consumer satisfaction, and other beneficiary experience areas.

Milwaukee Area Hospital Rates Vary Widely

Hospital rates in the Milwaukee area can vary wildly from hospital to hospital, with one hospital commanding rates more than four times what Medicare pays for the same services, according to a [new study](#). Rates in the metro area averaged more than double what Medicare pays for those same services and were the second highest among eight markets included in the survey of health costs.

[Health Plan Costs Rose 6.4% in State, Report Shows](#)

Wages and inflation are hardly rising, but health benefit costs for employers continue to grow at a healthy clip: 6.9% nationally and 6.4% in Wisconsin this year. The increase nationwide was a sharp jump from a 5.5% increase in 2009, while Wisconsin's growth in costs came in below last year's 6.8% pace, [the annual survey of employers by the consulting firm Mercer](#) shows.

[Wisconsin Hospitals Add Jobs During Downturn](#)

Wisconsin hospitals have added some 4,400 jobs since early 2008, including 1,100 in the first 10 months of this year, according to a new [Wisconsin Hospital Association report](#). The growth, accompanied by major expansions by several Milwaukee-area hospital systems, suggests the industry has remained fairly resilient even in the most severe economic downturn since the Depression.

[Growth in Health Care Costs Slows](#)

Health care costs in the Milwaukee area continue to move closer to those in other Midwestern cities, according to a [report](#) released this week by HCTrends. The report found that overall health care costs were about 5% above the average for 10 Midwestern cities last year, down from 2007, when they were 10% higher. The report was based on claims data, primarily from large employers, analyzed by the Benefit Services Group in Pewaukee.

[Seniors Should Check Medicare Advantage Options During Open-Enrollment](#)

The Medicare open-enrollment period is now open and runs through December 31. Insurance Commissioner Sean Dilweg is encouraging Wisconsin seniors to review their Medicare Advantage plan's coverage for 2011 to see if it still meets their needs at a cost they can afford to pay. This is the time of year to make changes, if appropriate. The federal government has a useful website ([Medicare.gov](#)) that will provide comprehensive information on the Medicare Advantage plans available in an area. Consumers can sign up for a plan from the website or contact the plan directly.

[Creating Electronic Verifications System for Doctors Practicing Over State Lines](#)

Medical license regulators meeting to consider ways to streamline border-crossing license requests hope to have an electronic verification system running by the summer of 2011, Wisconsin officials say. Expediting physician licensing and information sharing between states was the goal of medical boards from seven states attending a recent conference. The changes are seen as necessary as doctors expand services via the Internet and across state boundaries.

[49 Wisconsin Biotech Companies Awarded \\$13 Million in Federal Grants](#)

Forty-nine Wisconsin companies have been awarded more than \$13 million in grants from the Internal Revenue Service as part of a federal program to spur small-company job growth and advance the nation's competitiveness in life sciences. The project was part of health care reform legislation passed earlier this year and allocated \$1 billion of tax credits and grants. It is administered by the IRS in conjunction with the National Institutes of Health.

[Funds Awarded to Milwaukee Health Care Programs to Fight Breast Cancer](#)

Four Milwaukee health care programs have been awarded \$200,000 to increase the number of mammograms given to women in the Milwaukee area. The grant is being provided by the

American Cancer Society Midwest Division and Menomonee Falls-based Kohl's Department Stores for community-based participatory research, meant to foster community partnerships to develop, evaluate and implement interventions to reduce the number of women that develop breast cancer and die from the disease in southeast Wisconsin.

Marquette Researcher Receives NIH grant to Study Use of ER for Dental Care

Christopher Okunseri, associate professor of dental public health in the Marquette University School of Dentistry, has been awarded more than \$300,000 from the National Institutes of Health to study treatments provided to patients with non-traumatic dental conditions within hospital emergency departments in the United States.

The MCW and UWM Create Research Collaboration

Southeastern Wisconsin's two biggest academic research institutions have formed an alliance to develop and commercialize new technologies. The Medical College of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee say the new agreement will help them jointly market and license technologies, with the potential to contribute to the region's economic growth.

Hospice Care More Common in Wisconsin

Medicare patients with advanced cancer in the Milwaukee metropolitan area and in Wisconsin generally are more likely to receive hospice care and less likely to die in the hospital than the national averages, a new [report](#) says. The report, a first-ever look at cancer care at the end of life, shows significant variation in the care of such patients among hospitals nationally as well as within the Milwaukee area and Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Senior Health Programs Ailing

In May 2008, the Medical College of Wisconsin launched a program to provide specialized care for the elderly in Menomonee Falls. The program has provided care for roughly 1,500 people, bringing together specialists in geriatric medicine, geriatric psychiatry, social work and other disciplines to coordinate care for older adults with complex medical problems. But despite its well-regarded approach, the program is shutting down due to its \$1 million annual deficits.

Tobacco Sales to WI Kids Drop Again

Tobacco sales to Wisconsin minors decreased significantly this year. The state's 2010 Synar sales compliance survey, which determines the number of retail outlets selling tobacco illegally to minors, shows the noncompliance rate dropped to 4.7 percent, down from 5.7 percent in 2009.

WI Continues to Suffer from Binge Drinking, Massive Treatment Gap

Wisconsinites continue to binge drink to a staggering degree, while at the same time the state is failing to provide treatment for alcohol abuse to the men and women who need it most, according to a recent report by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. In 2007-08, nearly 22 percent of Wisconsinites ages 18-25 reported alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year, and more than half reported binge drinking in the prior month, both well above the national averages.

[Wisconsin Native Americans Have High Suicide Rate](#)

Despite 40 years of insight and ongoing prevention efforts, many native communities still struggle with keeping members from taking their own lives. Between 1999 and 2008, at least 86 Native Americans in Wisconsin have died by suicide — a figure that is likely lower than the actual toll, given that experts believe suicides are sometimes mislabeled as accidental overdoses, shootings and car crashes.

[Wisconsin Child Care Providers Join the Fight Against Childhood Obesity](#)

WI DHS has received a new CDC grant to promote physical activity and help prevent childhood obesity. “Active Early: Promoting Physical Activity in Early Care and Education” provides low or no-cost strategies and resources to promote at least 120 minutes of physical activity daily, targeting two to five-year-olds in 20 regulated child care sites statewide.

[Growing Demand for Services Leads to Expansion of Community Dental Clinics](#)

The growing number of low-income residents in the Fox Valley will soon receive greater access to dental care. Facilities are being expanded for two clinics — the Fox Cities Community Health Center's dental clinic and the Tri-County Community Dental Clinic — which serve people in Calumet, Outagamie and Winnebago counties who cannot afford private dental care.

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New and Updated Resources from the [Common Wealth Fund](#)

- [Why Not the Best?](#)
- [State Trends in Premiums and Deductibles, 2003–2009](#)

New and Updated Resources from [AHRQ](#)

New and Updated Resources from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)

[NPR Nursing Home Database](#)

NPR provides an interactive database that has information about the independence level of residents at nearly 16,000 individual nursing homes around the country. For each facility, see what percentage of residents can do various daily living tasks by themselves — an indication of their potential for community-based living.

Wisconsin Toolbox:

- [Wisconsin Health Insurance Coverage](#)
- [Fact Sheet on Health Care Reform in Wisconsin](#)
- [Optimizing Medicaid Enrollment: Wisconsin's ACCESS Internet Portal](#)
- [State Home Visiting Programs: Wisconsin](#)
- [Early Retiree Reinsurance Program: Wisconsin](#)

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

[Nominations for Physician Citizen of the Year Sought](#)

The Wisconsin Medical Society is seeking nominations for its Physician Citizen of the Year Award.

[Health for All: Images of Caring from Around the World](#)

November 1 - December 30, 2010, UW Madison, Health Sciences Learning Center, .

[Wisconsin Healthcare: The Post Election Environment](#)

December 9, Wauwatosa, WI

[Health Reform: New Directions?](#)

HealthWatch Wisconsin Annual Conference, March 7-8, Inn on the Park, Madison

[READING ROOM](#)

[Study: Private Insurers Control Costs Better Than Medicare](#)

Variations in health spending appear significantly related to whether Medicare or private insurance pays for health care, according to a new [study](#) published in the December *Health Affairs*. The study is a follow-up to a [highly publicized and widely cited](#) June 2009 *New Yorker* [article](#) by Atul Gawande, that had shown spending per Medicare member per year in McAllen Texas exceeded that in El Paso by 86 percent. The new study looked at claims data from the private insurer Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas and compared it to expenses for an average non-Medicare patient. The new study finds that total annual per capita spending in McAllen was 7 percent lower than in El Paso.

[Potentially Avoidable Hospitalizations High Among Medicare & Medicaid Patients](#)

Americans who were eligible for coverage under both Medicare and Medicaid in 2008 were hospitalized for bed sores, asthma, and diabetes at more than twice the rate of other Medicare beneficiaries, according to the latest *News and Numbers* from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). These "dual eligibles" also were 52 percent more likely than other Medicare patients to be hospitalized for urinary tract infections and more than a third more likely to be admitted for bacterial pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

[New Medicare/Medicaid Projects Aimed At Cheaper, Better Care](#)

Promising fast action, the new Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation is launching a series of initiatives aimed at improving medical care while reducing its cost. Acting Innovation Center Director Richard Gilfillan and Dr. Donald Berwick, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the center would work quickly to assess the results of the projects and, if successful, implement them promptly.

[Americans Uninsured at Least Part of the Year on the Rise, Harming Public Health](#)

The number of Americans—including those in the middle class—who have had periods without health coverage has risen considerably in recent years. That has led people with hypertension, diabetes and asthma to skip care, thus increasing their odds of developing costly complications, according to the findings of an extensive [government survey](#) released on Tuesday.

[New ACA Rules on Medical Loss Ratio to Take Effect](#)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued its regulations on medical payouts required under the health care law, a standard known as the medical loss ratio (MLR). The MLR goes into effect in January 2011 and insurers now writing their plans for next year have been asking for guidance from HHS as soon as possible.

[Studies: Lowering Copayments Boosts Medication Adherence](#)

A doctor's prescription won't do any good unless it's filled, and the medication being prescribed won't do any good unless it's taken. Figuring out how to make sure people take the crucial meds they're prescribed is a challenge, especially in hard economic times. One strategy might be to lower copays. But does that actually work to improve adherence or is it just subsidizing the purchase of drugs that would have been bought anyway? Two studies published in Health Affairs suggest that in some cases, it works — albeit modestly.

[Many Higher-Income Parents Forgoing Kids' Vaccinations: Report](#)

Vaccination rates for children insured by commercial plans dropped almost four percentage points between 2008 and 2009, even though the rate of children on Medicaid getting vaccinated is rising. "Rates had been gradually improving in the commercial plans. This was the first time we'd seen a drop -- and it was a pretty big drop," said Sarah Thomas, vice president of public policy and communication for the National Committee for Quality Assurance, which recently released its annual *State of Health Care Quality* report.

[How Do Adolescents View Health? Implications for State Health Policy](#)

Policy-makers rarely consult adolescents during development of health policies. However, perspectives of adolescents on health can inform public health policies and programs. As part of the development of an Indiana state plan for adolescent health, we used qualitative methods to describe adolescents' "emic" views of health, and discuss implications for a state health policy for youth.

[New Tobacco Strategy & Proposed New Warnings & Graphics](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has unveiled a new comprehensive tobacco control strategy that includes proposed new bolder health warnings on cigarette packages and advertisements. Once final, these health warnings on cigarettes and in cigarette advertisements will be the most significant change in more than 25 years. These actions are part of a broader strategy that will help tobacco users quit and prevent children from starting.

[Health Insurance Coverage and Health Care Utilization](#)

The increasing number of persons in the United States with no health insurance has implications both for individual health and societal costs. Because of cost concerns, millions of uninsured persons forgo some needed health care, which can lead to poorer health and potentially to greater medical expenditures in the long term.

[HHS Announces the Nation's New Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Agenda](#)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has released *Healthy People 2020*, the nation's new 10-year goals and objectives for health promotion and disease prevention, and "myHealthyPeople," a new challenge for technology application developers. For the past 30

years, Healthy People has been committed to improving the quality of our Nation's health by producing a framework for public health prevention priorities and actions.

[U.S. Patients Have More Access To Specialists, Less To Primary Care](#)

A new [international survey](#) finds that U.S. consumers report greater access to specialty health care but also have a tougher time seeing a doctor on the day they need help and in paying their medical bills than consumers in many other developed nations. Americans visit doctors and specialists more readily than some other countries, such as Canada and France, according to the survey, which was conducted in 11 countries.

[Measuring Medical Errors](#)

In December 1999, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) reported that medical errors cause up to 98,000 deaths and more than 1 million injuries each year in the United States. In response, accreditation bodies, payers, nonprofit organizations, governments, and hospitals launched major initiatives and invested considerable resources to improve patient safety. It remains unclear whether, in the aggregate, efforts to reduce errors at national, regional, and local levels have translated into significant improvements in the overall safety of patients.

[Report: FDA Fails to Monitor Safety of Medical Devices](#)

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is not properly monitoring the safety of medical devices, the authors of a new report charge. The FDA has the authority to approve both drugs and medical devices, but the investigators believe that the division responsible for device approval and safety is lax in both its initial approval of devices and its ongoing monitoring of related problems. "The agency often misses problematic devices," contends lead author Shannon Brownlee, an instructor at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice.

[Senate Passes Overhaul of Food Safety System](#)

The Senate passed a sweeping overhaul of the nation's [food safety](#) system, after tainted eggs, peanut butter and spinach sickened thousands of people in the last few years and led major food makers to join consumer advocates in demanding stronger government oversight. The legislation, which passed by a vote of 73 to 25, would greatly strengthen the [Food and Drug Administration](#), an agency that in recent decades focused more on policing medical products than ensuring the safety of food. The bill is intended to keep unsafe foods from reaching markets and restaurants, where they can make people sick — a change from the current practice, which mainly involves cracking down after outbreaks occur.

[School Lunch Bill Passes Congress; Establishes New Standards](#)

Congress gave final approval to a child nutrition bill that expands the school lunch program and sets new standards to improve the quality of school meals, with more fruits and vegetables. The bill gives the secretary of agriculture authority to establish nutrition standards for foods sold in schools during the school day, including items in vending machines. The standards would require schools to serve more fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. The bill will increase federal reimbursement for school lunches beyond inflation. It allows more than 100,000 children on Medicaid to qualify automatically for free school meals. And the bill regulates prices for lunches served to children with family incomes over 185 percent of the poverty level (more than \$40,793 a year for a family of four).