



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Population Health Institute

*Translating Research into Policy and Practice*

**eNEWS – October 2011**

**Vol. 11, No. 8**

**University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health**

---

The UW Population Health Institute's E-News is delivered monthly. Check our web site for additional information and updates: <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/uwphi/news.htm>. To subscribe or unsubscribe, reply to [Colleen Comeau](mailto:Colleen.Comeau@wisc.edu) with the word "subscribe" or "unsubscribe" in the subject line.

Information for E-news 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 Society, Wisconsin Hospital Association, Wispolitics.com, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, *The New York Times*, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *Milwaukee Business Journal*, *Wisconsin State Journal*, Wisconsin Technology Network, and others.

---

### *In This Issue*

---

#### **STATE NEWS**

- [DHS Details Plans for Medicaid Savings](#)
- [Report on Medicaid's Influence in Wisconsin](#)
- [Assembly Passes ACA-Consistent Legislation](#)
- [Workgroups Convened to Develop Wisconsin's Insurance Purchasing Exchange](#)
- [WI Joins 25 States in Appeal of ACA to Supreme Court](#)
- [Wisconsin Awarded \\$3.9 Million ACA Grant for Rate Review](#)
- [Wisconsin Ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in National Long-Term Support Services Ranking](#)
- [\\$9.2 Million Awarded to Reduce Smoking among BadgerCare, Pregnant Women](#)
- [Federal Court Dismisses Food Shares Lawsuit](#)
- ["Healthy Jobs Act" Proposed](#)
- [Proposed Wisconsin Patients' Bill of Rights](#)
- [Bill Proposed to Strengthen Quality of Nursing Homes](#)
- [Bill Proposed to Create Concussion Guidelines](#)
- [Academic, Medical Institutions Team Up on Health Care Challenges](#)
- [Nursing Shortage Expected in Wisconsin](#)
- [Marquette Nursing School Awarded \\$1 Million to Train Rural Nurses](#)
- [Physicians Urged to Complete Workforce Survey](#)
- [10 of top 100 Critical Access Hospitals Located in WI](#)
- [Milwaukee's Teen Birthrate Takes Steep Decline for Second Straight Year](#)
- [WPS loses Medicare Administrative Contract](#)
- [Wisconsin Receives \\$24 Million in ACA Transformation Grant Funding](#)
- [Milwaukee FQHCS Funded to Pursue Clinic Expansion on South Side](#)

- [Group Health Cooperative Named Among Top Ten Health Plans Nationally](#)
- [Dentists, Coalition Promote Healthy Choices Legislative Package](#)
- [Delta Dental Awards Marshfield \\$1.1 Million for Oral Health Initiative](#)
- [Legislative Audit Bureau: Review of Dental Grants & Contracts](#)
- [WI Receives \\$330,000 to Build Sustainable Partnerships for Housing Care](#)
- [Wisconsin Program Awarded \\$9.2 Million to Help Reduce Smoking](#)
- [Report to the Natural Resources Board: Silica Study](#)
- [UW Faculty Research: Mathematical Modeling May Improve Health Treatments](#)

## **RESEARCH AND PROGRAM TOOLS**

- New and Updated Resources from the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Kaiser Health News](#)
- New and Updated Resources from the [Commonwealth Fund](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Nat'l Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Maternal & Child Health Library](#)
- New and Updated Resources from the [CDC](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [HSRA](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [HHS](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [AHRQ](#)
  - [Be More Involved in Your Health Care: Tips for Patients](#)
  - [20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors](#)
  - [Questions are the Answer](#)
  - [Consejos de salud para tí \(Health Tips for You\)](#)
- [Longtermscorecard.org](#)
- [State at a Glance Chartbook](#)
- [Community Health Workers Toolkit](#)
- Wisconsin Toolbox:
  - [Ready WI](#)
  - [Wisconsin Immunization Program: Public Immunization Record Access](#)

## **EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- [ICD-10: Getting Started—A Webinar Series](#)
- [Preparing for Medicare in 2012 and Beyond: Stay Ahead of the Changes](#)
- [HRSA:Health IT and Quality Webinars](#)
- [HIPAA Collaborative of WI](#)
- [National Take-Back Initiative](#)
- [County Health Rankings: Moving from Data to Action](#)
- [School Crisis Preparedness Conferences](#)
- [MetaStar Health Care Quality Symposium](#)
- [Care Transitions Connection](#)
- [Introduction to Finding Grants](#)
- [Alzheimer's Disease Annual Update](#)
- [DQA Rural Hospital Survey Process: Rural Hospitals & State Surveyors](#)
- [The 2012 MEGA Conference: Excellence through Collaboration](#)
- [20th Annual \\$2,500 Rural Health Prize](#)

## READING ROOM

- [Higher Fees Paid to U.S. Physicians Drive Higher Spending for Physician Services](#)
  - [Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations](#)
  - [State Exchanges & Children's Coverage: Issues for State Design Decisions](#)
  - [States Switch Children from State Employee Health Plan to CHIP](#)
  - [Understanding the Rise in Health Insurance Premiums](#)
  - [Rate of Uninsured Stays Flat In 2010, Census Reports](#)
  - [2012 Medicare Advantage Premiums Fall & Projected Enrollment Rises](#)
  - [Probe: Drug Abusers Exploiting Medicare Benefit](#)
  - [Senate Panel Accuses Home-Health Industry of Bilking Medicare](#)
  - [Survey Shows Doctors Admit to Over-Treating Patients](#)
  - [Shortages Lead Doctors To Ration Critical Drugs](#)
  - [Weight Loss Program Projected To Save Medicare Up To \\$15 Billion](#)
  - [School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#)
  - [Lung Cancer Rates Decline Nationwide](#)
- 

## STATE NEWS

---

### [DHS Details Plans for Medicaid Savings](#)

DHS launched a website that details to reduce Medicaid expenditures by \$554.4 million over the biennium. Among the proposed changes: Moving all current BadgerCare Standard Plan (regular Medicaid) members who are above 100% FPL to a [“Alternative Benchmark”](#) plan, with a reduced benefit package, higher cost sharing, and stricter eligibility requirements for some people who have access to employer-based insurance. As well, DHS proposes a reimbursement [equity provision](#) that targets cost-based reimbursement, which would affect safety-net providers such as FQHCs, rural clinics, and critical access hospitals. If the state doesn't receive the waiver from the federal government, [DHS is authorized by the state's 2011-2013 budget to reduce eligibility for adults](#). The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families has [produced an analysis](#) of all of the proposed changes.

Related to this but not requiring any approvals: DHS is again [increasing the monthly premiums for BadgerCare Basic Plan](#). Starting in October, for November coverage, the monthly premium will increase from \$250/month to \$325/month. BadgerCare Basic is funded entirely by member premiums. It is only available to persons already enrolled and is no longer enrolling new members.

### [Report on Medicaid's Influence in Wisconsin](#)

A report recently released from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Diabetes Association, American Lung Association, and Families USA looks at the effects of Medicaid on Wisconsin residents who rely on Medicaid for their health care who have serious health care needs such as cancer, diabetes, chronic lung disease, and heart disease. The report concludes that without Medicaid, these individuals would not be able to afford the care they need and that state and federal cuts to Medicaid programs would put these individuals at risk.

### **[Assembly Passes ACA-Consistent Legislation](#)**

An amended version of a bill codifying state law with certain provisions in the federal Accountable Care Act (ACA) passed out of the Assembly Insurance Committee with bipartisan support. The law specifies that the legislature has oversight of establishing a health insurance exchange in the state and exempts insurers from federal ACA requirements if the law is found unconstitutional.

### **[Workgroups Convened to Develop Wisconsin's Insurance Purchasing Exchange](#)**

The federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires states to establish health insurance exchanges for consumers to purchase health insurance and utilize various subsidies. Wisconsin's Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI) has formed new "stakeholder working groups" to help plan and build the exchange. [Consumer advocacy groups](#), however, charge that the groups are [dominated by the insurance industry and business interests](#). Meanwhile, a new brief from the Kaiser Family Foundation summarizes Wisconsin's status thus far in [Implementing Health Insurance Exchanges](#).

### **[WI Joins 25 States in Appeal of ACA to Supreme Court](#)**

Wisconsin joined 25 states in bringing their opposition of the Affordable Care Act to the Supreme Court. They are asking the Supreme Court to strike down the entire law, not just the individual mandate. They asked for a quick ruling on the case, asking the court to act before the 2012 presidential election.

### **[Wisconsin Awarded \\$3.9 Million ACA Grant for Rate Review](#)**

Wisconsin is receiving nearly \$4 million from the [federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#) to improve its rate review program. The state's grant is in addition to a \$1 million rate review planning grant it received in in 2010's Cycle I. According to its award application, Wisconsin will continue to support the 5 positions created with Cycle I grant funds throughout Cycle II, and will create an online system for insurers to submit relevant rate filing data. The State will also enhance its Rate Tracking System. As of September 1, insurers must publicly justify premium increases greater than 10 percent. Next September, qualifying states will be able to replace that threshold with guidelines reflective of their unique cost trends. The [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel discusses](#) the potential affects of this rate regulation.

### **[Wisconsin Ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in National Long-Term Support Services Ranking](#)**

Wisconsin ranked 5<sup>th</sup> nationally in a new report, [Raising Expectations: A State Scorecard on Long-Term Services and Supports for Older Adults, People with Physical Disabilities, and Family Caregivers](#), released by AARP, The Commonwealth Fund, and The Scan Foundation. The report measures state-level performance of long-term services and support (LTSS) systems providing assistance to older people and adults with disabilities. If Wisconsin were to improve to the level of the top performing state, 9,542 more low- or moderate-income adults with ADL disabilities would be covered by Medicaid and 6,057 more new users of Medicaid LTSS would first receive services in home and community based settings, instead of nursing homes.

### **[\\$9.2 Million Awarded to Reduce Smoking among BadgerCare, Pregnant Women](#)**

A Wisconsin partnership will receive \$9.2 million over five years from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS) to reduce smoking rates among Medicaid enrollees, with a special

emphasis on pregnant smokers. The Striving to Quit initiative will target BadgerCare Plus members in two regions of the state and BadgerCare Plus high risk pregnant women in five counties. More than 8,000 adults and 3,000 pregnant women will be offered free smoking cessation counseling and incentives through the statewide Tobacco Quit Line and the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation's (WWHF) First Breath program.

### **Federal Court Dismisses Food Shares Lawsuit**

The class action lawsuit filed against the State Department of Health Services (DHS), which alleged that thousands of low-income in Milwaukee County were forced to wait months for food stamps and other benefits has been dismissed by a federal judge. The original lawsuit was filed three years ago in the [Eastern District of Wisconsin](#). All parties agreed to the settlement.

### **"Healthy Jobs Act" Proposed**

[Assembly Bill 220](#) and [Senate Bill 164](#) have been propose to encourage businesses to control health care costs through the programs aimed toward prevention of chronic disease. The proposed bills would function as an income and franchise tax credit that would allow a credit of up to 30% of the amount that an employer pays in the taxable year to provide workplace wellness programs to their employees. A [substitute amendment](#) has now been proposed to the Assembly and Senate workplace wellness bills. The amended version reduces the amount of tax credits available each year from \$5 million to \$3 million and limits the credits to small businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

### **Proposed Wisconsin Patients' Bill of Rights**

A proposed bill, the Wisconsin Patients' Bill of Rights, seeks to secure into state law key health care consumer and patient protections provided under the federal Affordable Care Act. The key protections that would be afforded under the law include: prohibiting insurers from denying coverage based on a pre-existing condition or dropping coverage when someone gets sick; removing annual and lifetime benefit caps for children and adults; and guaranteeing preventive care without co-pays and deductibles.

### **Bill Proposed to Strengthen Quality of Nursing Homes**

The authors of [Assembly Bill 302](#), otherwise known as the Strengthening our Nursing Homes Act, created the proposed legislation to both assure quality and improve the quality of care in Wisconsin's nursing homes. The proposed bill also gives the Department of Health Services (DHS) the power to use federally issued citations as grounds to enforce various state powers, such as suspending admissions or revoking facility licenses' for repeat violations, or for jeopardizing care of residents.

### **Bill Proposed to Create Concussion Guidelines**

Passage of [Assembly Bill 259](#) was strongly urged by medical professionals, the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association as well as concussion survivors. The proposed bill would set guidelines on head injuries and set and rules for handling injured young athletes, educating coaches, parents and athletes about the risks caused by head injuries in youth athletics, which experts say are increasing. The proposed legislation would apply to any organized athletic activity for youth between the ages of 11 and 19, including both public and private school activities as well as athletic clubs. Several other states already have similar laws in place.

### **[Academic, Medical Institutions Team Up on Health Care Challenges](#)**

The Medical College of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Marquette University are pooling their knowledge of economics, engineering and medicine to find ways to slow the rise of health care costs. Froedtert Health and Children's Hospital and Health System will also be part of the collaboration.

### **[Nursing Shortage Expected in Wisconsin](#)**

A recent survey from the office of [Workforce Development](#) shows that Wisconsin will soon be in great need of nurses. The reason for this upcoming shortfall in nursing staff is largely due to the fact that the greatest percentage of LPNs currently working in the state are between the ages of 55-59, 40% of whom plan on retiring in the next five years.

### **[Marquette Nursing School Awarded \\$1 Million to Train Rural Nurses](#)**

The Marquette University College of Nursing has been awarded a more than \$1 million from the U.S. DHHS to train more rural nurses. It will receive the funding over three years to develop a residency program, working with Ministry Health Care in Wisconsin, as well as partners in Illinois and Idaho. The SOAR-RN project builds on the Wisconsin Nurse Residency Program.

### **[Physicians Urged to Complete Workforce Survey](#)**

As part of a biennial license renewal process, all physicians are encouraged to complete the online Physician Workforce Survey. The results of the survey will provide valuable information regarding the current work force in the state and will be used to create future projections of supply and help identify current shortage areas.

### **[10 of top 100 Critical Access Hospitals Located in WI](#)**

The Joint Commission Annual Report recently announced its list of the 100 best critical access hospitals in the country, and one in ten of these hospitals are located in Wisconsin. The list is meant to provide hospital executives, trustees and board members an objective measure of their performance against peer facilities.

### **[Milwaukee's Teen Birthrate Takes Steep Decline for Second Straight Year](#)**

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reports that Milwaukee's teen birthrate dropped dramatically for the second year in a row. The preliminary data shows a drop from 2009-2011 from 41.30 births per 1,000 teens to 35.68 per 1,000. From 2008 to 2009, the rate fell from 46.73 to 41.30 births per 1,000 teens. The city counts births between ages 15 and 17. The reduction of 5.6 births per 1,000 teens last year keeps Milwaukee ahead of the pace needed to reach its goal of being in line with the state rate by 2015.

### **[WPS loses Medicare Administrative Contract](#)**

Wisconsin Physicians Service Insurance Corporation lost the contract to administer Part B Medicare claims in Wisconsin. The new Medicare Administrative contract has been awarded by U.S. DHHS to Indianapolis-based National Government Solutions for the jurisdiction that includes Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota. National Government Solutions will process claims for Medicare Part A and Part B. It will also be responsible for enrolling, educating and auditing Medicare providers. WPS did [win the contract for the Michigan and Indiana jurisdiction](#), and is the contractor for Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa.

### **[Wisconsin Receives \\$24 Million in ACA Transformation Grant Funding](#)**

Wisconsin has received \$24 million from a federal grant provided through the Affordable Care Act's [Community Transformation Grant](#) program. The University Health Services and its Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources received \$23.5 million dollars to work on tackling the root causes of some chronic diseases such as smoking, poor diet and lack of physical activity and the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council also was awarded a \$499,982 grant to assess needs and to plan interventions in support of healthy lifestyles to reduce chronic disease among Wisconsin tribal populations.

### **[Milwaukee FQHCS Funded to Pursue Clinic Expansion on South Side](#)**

The Milwaukee Health Care Partnership has been awarded an \$80,000 planning grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to plan for expanded primary care services in Milwaukee's south side. Planners will work closely with the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center and Health Care of the Homeless. The process will lead to an application for federal funding of a New Access Point in 2012. The goal is to build three additional satellite health centers.

### **[Group Health Cooperative Named Among Top Ten Health Plans Nationally](#)**

The National Committee on Quality Assurance ranks the Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin the seventh-best private health plan in the country. This is the sixth year in a row Group Health has made the top 10. Other Wisconsin health plans in the NCQA top 50: Security Health Plan (38), Unity Health Plan (46), Arise Health Plan (48), and Network Health Plan (50).

### **[Dentists, Coalition Promote Healthy Choices Legislative Package](#)**

The Wisconsin Dental Association has developed a package of legislation titled Healthy Choices that is being promoted in coalition with seven other organizations: the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin, Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin, Community Living Alliance, Independence First, Rehabilitation for Wisconsin, Wisconsin Assisted Living Association, and Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. Among other items, the Healthy Choices proposal allows dentists to delegate more procedures to certified Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries - dental hygienists and dental assistants.

### **[Delta Dental Awards Marshfield \\$1.1 million for Oral Health Initiative](#)**

Delta Dental of Wisconsin has awarded \$1.1 million to Marshfield Clinic research to further integrate medical records and dental records in a single electronic health record that provides a detailed picture of an individual's whole-body health. Marshfield is also working on oral-and-systemic-health research, understanding links between oral health and diabetes, heart disease, and preterm births. The dental and craniofacial research uses the latest molecular and genetic tools to explore health and diseases in that region of the body.

### **[Legislative Audit Bureau: Review of Dental Grants & Contracts](#)**

The Legislative Audit Bureau completed reviews of the [Marquette Dental Services Grant](#), the [Marquette Dental Education Contract](#), and the [Medical College of Wisconsin Aid for Medical Education](#) review successfully.

### **[WI Receives \\$330,000 to Build Sustainable Partnerships for Housing Care](#)**

Wisconsin was one of just six states to receive funding from HHS to develop sustainable partnerships with State Housing Agencies. The funding, called Real Choice System Change Grants, is meant to result in long-term strategies to provide permanent and affordable rental housing for people with disabilities who receive Medicaid services.

### **[Wisconsin Program Awarded \\$9.2 Million to Help Reduce Smoking](#)**

The Striving to Quit initiative, a program targeting BaderCare Plus members, received \$9.2 million over five years from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare (CMS) to reduce smoking rates, with a special emphasis on pregnant smokers. More than 11,000 adults, 3,000 of whom are pregnant women, will be offered free smoking cessation counseling through the program.

### **[Report to the Natural Resources Board: Silica Study](#)**

What is currently known about the sources, health effects, exposures, controls and regulatory status of silica in Wisconsin is described in this report. The report concludes that because there is very little conclusive information in existence regarding sources, controls or levels of silica present in ambient air, it is not currently possible to determine conclusively whether or to what extent the quantity, duration or types of silica emissions in the state may be a public health concern.

### **[UW Faculty Research: Mathematical Modeling May Improve Health Treatments](#)**

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* profiles the work of UW Population Health Sciences faculty economist Dr. Dave Vanness, who uses computer models, meshing math and biology to understand the effectiveness of diagnostic tests and treatments. Dr. Vanness' work is aimed toward answering question, without clinical trials, such as: What is the maximum dose of a drug that will limit side effects to an acceptable level? How many patients would benefit from a treatment and how many would be harmed? Would the potential benefit of screening everyone for a disease outweigh the potential harm to people who receive unneeded care because of inaccurate results?

## **RESEARCH AND PROGRAM TOOLS**

- New and Updated Resources from the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Kaiser Health News](#)
- New and Updated Resources from the [Commonwealth Fund](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Nat'l Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [Maternal & Child Health Library](#)
- New and Updated Resources from the [CDC](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [HSRA](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [HHS](#)
- New and Updated Resources from [AHRO](#)
  - [Be More Involved in Your Health Care: Tips for Patients](#)
  - [20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors](#)
  - [Questions are the Answer](#)
  - [Consejos de salud para tí \(Health Tips for You\)](#)
- [Longtermscorecard.org](#)

- [State at a Glance Chartbook](#)
- [Community Health Workers Toolkit](#)
- Wisconsin Toolbox:
  - [Ready WI](#)  
Ready Wisconsin our state's counterpart to the national public service advertising campaign designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies.
  - [Wisconsin Immunization Program: Public Immunization Record Access](#)  
Parents and legal guardians now have access to look up their child's immunization record in the Wisconsin Immunization Registry (WIR). This tool streamlines immunization records so that information from various providers is all in one place, helping parents know which vaccine children need at any particular time.

## **EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

[ICD-10: Getting Started—A Webinar Series](#), November 8<sup>th</sup>, December 14<sup>th</sup>, Webinar

[Preparing for Medicare in 2012 and Beyond: Stay Ahead of the Changes](#), October 18<sup>th</sup>, Madison, WI; October 19<sup>th</sup>, Milwaukee, WI; October 20<sup>th</sup>, Green Bay, WI

[HRSA:Health IT and Quality Webinars](#), October 21<sup>st</sup>, Webinar

[HIPAA Collaborative of WI](#), October 21<sup>st</sup>, Green Lake, WI

[National Take-Back Initiative](#), October 29<sup>th</sup>, Webinar

[County Health Rankings: Moving from Data to Action](#), October 30<sup>th</sup>, Washington, D.C.

[School Crisis Preparedness Conferences](#), October 31<sup>st</sup>, Chippewa Falls, WI; November 14<sup>th</sup>, Green Bay, WI; November 30<sup>th</sup>, Oshkosh, WI

[MetaStar Health Care Quality Symposium](#), November 1<sup>st</sup>, Wisconsin Dells, WI

[Care Transitions Connection](#), November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Wisconsin Dells, WI

[Introduction to Finding Grants](#), November 4<sup>th</sup>, Madison, WI

[Alzheimer's Disease Annual Update](#), November 4<sup>th</sup>, Madison, WI

[DQA Rural Hospital Survey Process: Improving Relationships between Hospitals & State Surveyors](#), November 14<sup>th</sup>, Sauk City, WI

[The 2012 MEGA Conference: Excellence through Collaboration](#)  
January 18-20, Wisconsin Dells, WI

### **20th Annual \$2,500 Rural Health Prize** - April 15 Deadline

The Hermes Monato, Jr. Prize of \$2,500 is awarded annually for the best rural health paper. It is open to all students of the University of Wisconsin (any campus). Students are encouraged to write on a rural health topic for a regular class and then to submit a copy to the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative as an entry by April 15th.

## **READING ROOM**

---

### **Higher Fees Paid to U.S. Physicians Drive Higher Spending for Physician Services**

A new study reports that primary care physicians in the U.S. receive somewhat higher fees than comparison countries, while orthopedic surgeons receive much higher fees in the U.S. than comparison countries for hip replacements: this was true of both public and private payers. Many analysts suggest that these higher physician fees contribute to the U.S. higher overall spending. This study compares the U.S. to Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the U.K.

### **Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations**

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report assessing the current oral health care system and making recommendations on ways to improve access to care for vulnerable and underserved populations. IOM recommends changes to incorporate oral health care into overall health care, changes in education and training of all types of health care professionals, and changes in how oral health care is financed and delivered.

### **State Exchanges & Children's Coverage: Issues for State Design Decisions**

The National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices offers guidelines for states to consider when setting up their health insurance exchanges. The NGA particularly focuses on how states will handle CHIP and children's coverage through exchanges.

### **States Switch Children from State Employee Health Plan to CHIP**

Several states have recently made the decision to switch children from their state employee health plans to the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) – a practice authorized by the ACA. CHIP receives federal matching funds, thus saving relieving some of the strain on these state budgets. So far, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved the switch for Montana, Alabama, Texas, Kentucky and Pennsylvania: Georgia next in line. This change worries medical providers who fear the lower reimbursement rates.

### **Understanding the Rise in Health Insurance Premiums**

**Kaiser Family Foundation/Health Research and Education Trust (KFF/HRET) Employer Health Benefits Survey** reports on the relatively sharp rise in employer-sponsored health insurance premiums this year. Premiums rose by 3% in 2009-2010, while this year increased 8% for singles and 9% for family coverage. The KFF analysis considers how the ACA, technology, inflation and an aging population contribute to this premium increase. The ACA, the report concludes, is responsible for only 1.8% of the increase in premiums, while increasing coverage for preventive services and catastrophic health care costs.

### **[Rate of Uninsured Stays Flat In 2010, Census Reports](#)**

Recent [U.S. Census](#) data shows that the rate of people without health insurance in 2010 stayed flat and statistically the same as the year before at 16.3% with about 50 million Americans uninsured. The new census data causes some question what this means for the [future of employer sponsored health insurance](#): the new figures show that just over half (55.3%) of Americans currently have employer sponsored health insurance

### **[2012 Medicare Advantage Premiums Fall & Projected Enrollment Rises](#)**

[Federal officials report](#) that Medicare Advantage premiums will go down next year by 4% on average, from an average of \$33.48 a month this year to \$32 a month next year. They also project enrollment in Medicare Advantage to go by about 10%, despite the Congressional Budget Office predictions of a leveling off in 2011.

### **[Probe: Drug Abusers Exploiting Medicare Benefit](#)**

A recent report from the [Government Accountability Office](#) has found a trend in abuse of the Medicare system to obtain popular prescription drugs. The report notes that the popular Medicare prescription program is an easy target for both individuals with drug addictions as well as those selling the drugs for profit, and tax payers who pay for roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Medicare's prescription drug program costs, end up footing most of the bill.

### **[Senate Panel Accuses Home-Health Industry of Bilking Medicare](#)**

The three largest home-health companies are alleged to have bilked the federal government out of potentially millions of dollars. Apparently these companies ordered unnecessary therapies for their customers, increasing their reimbursements by reaching certain thresholds. This information was presented in a [report](#) from the Senate Finance Committee.

### **[Survey Shows Doctors Admit to Over-Treating Patients](#)**

A [recent survey](#) found that almost half of physicians believe that their patients are receiving too much medical attention. The most common reasons physicians cited for giving too much medical attention are malpractice concerns, clinical performance measures, inadequate time to spend with patients, and financial incentives. Over three quarters of physicians surveyed are interested in knowing how their peers practice medicine and would like to compare notes.

### **[Shortages Lead Doctors To Ration Critical Drugs](#)**

Shortages in medications are leading doctors and drug companies to ration medications. [Shortages](#) are not limited to one type or class of medication: shortages are present across the board and include cancer chemotherapy agents, anesthetics, antibiotics, and electrolytes needed for nutrient solutions, just to name a few. A recent anonymous [survey](#) conducted by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists found that these shortages have had dire consequences not just limited to delays: some patients have died. The FDA asserts that just 11% of medication shortages are due to a company ending production due to unprofitability. Rather, errors in the manufacturing process stops production. Because so few companies are making essential drugs, when one stops producing, there may only be one other supplier.

### **Weight Loss Program Projected To Save Medicare Up To \$15 Billion**

Medicare could save up to \$15 billion over the lifetimes of prediabetic adults ages 60-64 if the federal government made community-based weight loss programs available to people age 60 or older who were at risk for diabetes or heart disease, according to a study in the September 2011 issue of *Health Affairs*. The program--potentially implemented in partnership with YMCAs across the country--could offer help with the very real problem of weight gain and pare the federal budget at the same time. Researchers say investment would pay off by helping prevent diabetes and other chronic disease.

### **School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity**

The Division of Adolescent and School Health and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, believe that schools have a responsibility to help stop the increase in obesity rates in children. These obesity rates are related to a number of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high levels of cholesterol, and high blood glucose levels. Schools can do more to promote physical activity and healthy eating habits through policies, practices and supportive environments and this report provides guidelines to help schools accomplish these tasks.

### **Lung Cancer Rates Decline Nationwide**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported a decrease in the rates of new lung cancer cases in the United States. Rates of new lung cancer cases decreased for both men and women and this decrease corresponds with [smoking patterns](#) across the country. New lung cancer case rates are decreasing faster in the West where there is a lower prevalence of smoking among both men and women.