

Federal Health Update

JAN. 8, 2016

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **On Jan. 5, 2016, Congressman Steve Israel announced will not seek reelection this November.** Israel has represented New York's 3rd Congressional District for eight terms. He currently serves on the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **On Jan. 4, 2016, the Department of Defense (DoD) released the Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR) for the third quarter of calendar year 2015.**

The report summarizes confirmed suicide counts for all services and components during the months of July through September 2015, and also includes total suicide counts for calendar years 2012, 2013 and 2014.

In the third quarter of 2015, there were 72 suicides among service members in the active component, and 70 suicides in the reserve component, which includes 38 suicides among reserve service members and 32 suicides among service members in the National Guard.

The QSR is intended to communicate the department's suicide data on a routine basis. The QSR is available at <http://www.dspo.mil/SuicideData/QuarterlyReports.aspx>. Additional suicide

prevention information is available on the Defense Suicide Prevention Office website at <http://www.dspo.mil/> .

The DoD continues to partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to promote the Military Crisis Line, a 24/7 confidential crisis line staffed by caring, qualified responders, many of who have served in uniform themselves. The number is 1-800-273-8255, press 1 for military.

Additionally, Military OneSource provides free and confidential peer counseling for service members and their families. The number is 1-800-342-9647 or visit: <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>.

- **The director of the Defense Health Agency's Health IT Directorate, David Bowen, retired from federal service Jan. 2, 2016.**

Bowen also served as chief information officer for the Military Health System. During the past two years, he has been a significant contributor to DHA's efforts to reach full operating capability. He concludes 10 years of federal service, serving with DHA since its inception. Earlier this year, Bowen was given the Federal Health IT Leadership Award by the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HiMSS) for his efforts.

Before coming to DHA, Bowen was the assistant administrator, Information Services and CIO at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). While at FAA, he developed and implemented new cyber security and privacy policies and practices to protect systems and data. He also initiated efforts to position information technology as a shared service, and implemented a cyber-defense capability that was marketed to other government agencies.

Bowen said the biggest challenge he faced as director of the HIT Directorate was streamlining the approach of the four services regarding health IT (Army, Navy, Air Force and TRICARE) since each does things differently. "Understandably, they all have different missions, and different cultures," he said. "And those factors drive the way that they do things. Now we're putting them all together, and we have to decide which way is the best way, and have everyone adapt their own methodologies to the DHA standard of doing things."

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs opened one of eight planned regional offices in Fort Smith on Jan. 6, 2016.**

The regionalization is part of an initiative under the agency's first-ever long-term strategic plan that was approved by Gov. Asa Hutchinson in June. The Fort Smith office is the fifth of eight new district offices to open that will bring agency veteran service officers closer to the veterans and counties they serve.

Before the plan was implemented, veterans from across the state seeking assistance from a state veteran service officer had to travel to North Little Rock. Part of the agency's long-term strategic plan is to strengthen the overall effectiveness in the veteran service officer network. Beyond additional offices, the plan also provide staff with training, accreditation to gain access to the federal Veterans Affairs system and provide day-to-day support.

Established in 1923, the agency's purpose is to serve Arkansas' veterans and their eligible dependents through advocacy and education to access federal and state benefits, high-quality long-term nursing care and burial honors, according to information provided by the agency.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **According to a new Health and Human Services report released, more than 11.3 million people are signed up for coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplaces in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.**

Seventy-six percent (8.6 million people) in the 38 states obtained their health care coverage through the HealthCare.gov platform as of Jan. 2, 2016.

For the first time, the report includes data for all 50 states and the District of Columbia for the third Open Enrollment period. It also includes demographic and state-level breakdowns. Open Enrollment ends Jan. 31, 2016. For coverage starting on Feb. 1, people must sign up by the Jan. 15 deadline.

Nationwide, almost 4 million people under 35 are signed up for Marketplace coverage through Dec. 26. Of those, nearly 3 million of them are ages 18 to 34. That's more than a quarter of all plan selections. About 770,000 young people ages 18 to 34 are new to the Marketplace in HealthCare.gov states as of Dec. 26, which means 31 percent of new enrollees in those states are 18 to 34 years of age.

The data demonstrates that Marketplace consumers are actively engaged in shopping and choosing the best plan for them. Among the 8.2 million reenrolling customers nationwide as of Dec. 26, more than half (4.2 million) came back, reviewed their information and actively selected a Marketplace plan. About 60 percent of people who actively reenrolled in HealthCare.gov states, or 2.2 million people, switched to a different plan than they had for 2015 coverage.

The final number of plan selections to date could fluctuate as plan changes or cancellations occur, such as in response to life changes like starting a new job or getting married. In addition, today's report only looks at plan selections and does not include the number of consumers who paid their premiums to effectuate their enrollment.

To read the report and see state level tables visit: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/health-insurance-marketplaces-2016-open-enrollment-period-january-enrollment-report>.

- **Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia M. Burwell and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack released updated nutritional guidelines that encourage Americans to adopt a series of science-based recommendations to improve how they eat to reduce obesity and prevent chronic diseases like type-2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.**

The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* is the nation's trusted resource for evidence-based nutrition recommendations and serves to provide the general public, as well as policy makers and health professionals with the information they need to help the public make informed choices about their diets at home, school, work and in their communities.

The newly released 8th edition of the Dietary Guidelines reflects advancements in scientific understanding about healthy eating choices and health outcomes over a lifetime. This edition recognizes the importance of focusing not on individual nutrients or foods in isolation, but on the variety of what people eat and drink—healthy eating patterns as a whole—to bring about lasting improvements in individual and population health.

The specific recommendations fit into five overarching guidelines in the new edition:

- Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan. Eating patterns are the combination of foods and drinks that a person eats over time

- Focus on variety, nutrient-dense foods, and amount
- Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats, and reduce sodium intake
- Shift to healthier food and beverage choices
- Support healthy eating patterns for all

Healthy eating patterns include a variety of nutritious foods like vegetables, fruits, grains, low-fat and fat-free dairy, lean meats and other protein foods and oils, while limiting saturated fats, *trans* fats, added sugars and sodium. A healthy eating pattern is adaptable to a person's taste preferences, traditions, culture and budget.

Importantly, the guidelines suggest Americans should consume:

- A variety of vegetables, including dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy and other vegetables
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, and nuts and seeds
- Oils, including those from plants: canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, and sunflower. Oils also are naturally present in nuts, seeds, seafood, olives, and avocados

Further, Americans should be encouraged to consume:

- Less than 10 percent of calories per day from added sugars. ChooseMyPlate.gov provides more information about added sugars, which are sugars and syrups that are added to foods or beverages when they are processed or prepared. This does not include naturally occurring sugars such as those consumed as part of milk and fruits
- Less than 10 percent of calories per day from saturated fats. The Nutrition Facts label can be used to check for saturated fats. Foods that are high in saturated fat include butter, whole milk, meats that are not labeled as lean, and tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil
- Less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day of sodium for people over the age of 14 years and less for those younger. The Nutrition Facts label is a helpful tool to check for sodium, especially in processed foods like pizza, pasta dishes, sauces, and soups

Based on a review of current scientific evidence on nutrition, the 2015 edition includes updated guidance on topics such as added sugars, sodium, and cholesterol and new information on caffeine. For example, the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* is the first edition to recommend a quantitative limit to consume less than 10 percent of calories from added sugars. This edition also reaffirms guidance about the core building blocks of a healthy lifestyle that have remained consistent over the past several editions, and suggests there is still work to be done to encourage more Americans to follow the recommendations outlined in the *Dietary Guidelines*.

The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* was informed by the recommendations of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, which was composed of prestigious researchers in the fields of nutrition, health, and medicine, and by consideration of public and federal agency comments.

Since 1980, HHS and USDA have shared a responsibility to the American public to ensure that advancements in scientific understanding about the role of nutrition in health are incorporated into the *Dietary Guidelines*, which is updated every five years. USDA has also released updates for consumers on ChooseMyPlate.gov, and new resources will soon be available on Health.gov from HHS that will help health professionals support their clients and patients in making healthy choices.

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is available at www.dietaryguidelines.gov.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “DoD and VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Help Ensure Appropriate Medication Continuation and Prescribing Practices,” (GAO-16-158) on Jan. 5, 2016.** GAO examined the extent to which DOD and VHA developed and monitored recommended medication practices for PTSD and TBI; the extent to which psychiatric, pain, and sleep medications on DOD's formulary are on VA's formulary, and how differences might affect medication continuation; and key efforts VHA has to help ensure medication continuation, and the extent it is monitoring these efforts. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/674495.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **Jan. 12, 2016**, to examine defense health care reform.
- The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will hold a hearing on **Jan. 12, 2016**, to consider the nomination of Robert McKinnon Califf, of South Carolina, to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.4315** (introduced Jan. 5, 2016): Mental Health Access and Gun Violence Prevention Act of 2016 was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committees on the Judiciary, and Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Sheila Jackson Lee [TX-18]

MEETINGS

- A National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health webinar “Public Health Incident Leadership,” will be held on **Jan. 28, 2016 at 1:00 pm ET**. Mickey Scullard, MPH, MEP and Deb Radi MBA, BSW, both of the Minnesota Department of Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, will present this webinar on how to apply everyday leadership skills to emergency response. To access the webinar, please visit: <http://ncdmph.adobeconnect.com/r29la7j8m1g/>. Call in: 1-888-537-7715, Participant Code: 39933371
 - The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 5, 2016**, in Washington D.C. <http://www.hjfc3.org/heroes-dinner>
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