

Federal Health Update

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **The House and Senate have passed H.R. 933, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act.**

The bill provides \$984 billion continuing resolution that keeps the government funded through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.

The legislation includes a full appropriations bill for Defense spending and also provides the military and some domestic agencies more flexibility in dealing with \$85 billion in automatic spending cuts.

The stop-gap measure, which funds government agencies and discretionary programs through the Sept. 30 end of the current fiscal year, now moves to President Barack Obama's desk to be signed into law.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **On March 15, 2013, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica L. Wright submitted to Congress the first of three reports detailing the plan to reform the Military Health System.**

The report describes the goals of the reform effort, including goals to improve clinical and business practices, achieve cost and personnel reductions through the newly established Defense Health Agency.

To read the report, please visit:

<http://www.tricare.mil/tma/congressionalinformation/downloads/Plan%20for%20Reform%20of%20the%20Administration%20of%20Military%20Health.pdf>.

- **The Department of Defense announced it has decided to delay the issuance of civilian employee furlough notices for approximately two weeks.**

This delay will allow the department to carefully analyze the impact of pending continuing resolution legislation on the department's resources. We have not made any decisions on whether or not the total number of planned furlough days for fiscal 2013 will change as a result of this delay.

- **The Department of Defense announced the selection of 13 sites to participate in its Healthy Base Initiative (HBI), a demonstration project for Operation Live Well, aimed at increasing the health and wellness of the total force, including civilians and family members.**

Eleven of the pilot sites participating in the assessment are military installations: Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Sill, Okla.; Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii; Sub Base New London, Conn.; Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; Yokota Air Base, Japan; Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center/Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command, Twenty-nine Palms, Calif.; Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.; U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod, Mass.; March Air Reserve Base, Calif.; and Camp Dodge, Iowa. The remaining two sites participating are the Defense Logistics Agency, Fort Belvoir, Va.; and Defense Health Headquarters, Falls Church, Va..

A healthy and fit force is essential to national security as service members must be physically prepared to deploy in a moment's notice anywhere on the globe to extremely austere and demanding conditions. As part of this year-long demonstration project, participating installations will be examined for their ability to create environments that enable sustainable healthy lifestyles.

While HBI is designed to identify effective ways to improve the overall health and wellness of service members, families and civilians, specific efforts will focus on making informed nutritional food choices, increased physical activity, weight management and tobacco cessation. Many of the services' and installations' longstanding programs will be evaluated to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Best practices across participants will be shared with the services for further implementation throughout the force.

More information about Operation Live Well and the Healthy Base Initiative, please visit:

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/olw>.

- **Nutrition Program Manager Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Wallinger was featured segment on the Navy video series, All Hands Update.**

Navy has dedicated March as [Nutrition Month](#), to help Sailors and their families learn about food literacy and for Navy commands to participate in interactive workshops, healthy cooking competitions and nutrition training events.

To learn more about food literacy and the [Navy's March health campaign](#) focused on proper nutrition, please visit: <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion>.

To learn more about the Defense-wide healthy living campaign, please visit: [Operation Live Well](#).

- **Brain injuries affect more than the individual and to help families with loved ones affected by traumatic brain injuries cope, the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center has published a [guide](#).**

The guide offers families advice and strategies to cope with the behavioral and emotional changes associated with TBI and covers topics including talking with children about moderate or severe TBI, taking care of oneself while caring for others and addressing family needs. Helping families and caregivers understand their crucial roles is the purpose of this suite of resources.

- **The Department of Defense (DOD announced the winners of the first Military Health System Innovation Challenge, launched in December 2012.**

The competition drew more than 120 proposals, including three selected for further development.

The three winning ideas undergoing development are:

- [StorkTracker: A Mobile Application of the Goal-Oriented Guide to Prenatal Care](#), submitted by Dr. Christy Ledford, Health Affairs/TRICARE Management Activity
 - [The Military Acuity Model](#), submitted by Capt. Rosser Birdsong, Air Force
 - [TRICARE Rewards: A Customer Loyalty Incentive Program](#), submitted by Col. Mark Cronk, Army

The Innovation challenge was open to all Defense personnel. Ideas were judged based on innovativeness, cost-effectiveness, ease of implementation, adherence to the quadruple aim, and scalability across the entire DoD enterprise.

More information about MHS Innovation is available on [LinkedIn](#).

- **The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) in Bethesda, Md. has earned distinction as one of the top-ranked U.S. graduate schools.**

U.S. News & World Report identified the university's F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine as a top-tier medical school in its "Best Graduate Schools 2014" rankings released last week.

USU's primary-care program ranked 39th among 126 medical schools, and its research programs ranked 55th.

In addition, the university's nurse anesthesia master's degree program ranked fifth in the nation. Its partner program, run by the Army in San Antonio, maintained the No. 1 ranking it has held for the past several years.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the largest U.S. physician specialty society, has recognized the university's family medicine department has one of the nation's top 10 for the past three years, he reported.

USU is unique among medical schools, as it produces highly trained medical professionals for both the military and the Public Health Service. Students arrive with a commitment to military or federal service and the men and women in uniform they will care for, often in harm's way.

About 40 percent of USU's graduates go into primary care, about twice the percentage of those at other medical schools. In addition, the university distinguishes itself with a heavy emphasis on

preventive medicine and research directly relevant to the military: traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, emerging infectious diseases and combat casualty care.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs has canceled the 2013 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Buffalo NY.**

The department decided not to hold the event, which had been scheduled for May 30 through June 4, because of budget concerns according to Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo.

But in a statement, the department offered a slightly different explanation.

“In an effort to ensure we meet the high standards of excellence, good governance and efficiency, we evaluate each event, program and initiative for alignment with the department’s core mission and priorities,” the statement said. “After going through a comprehensive assessment, VA has decided to postpone the 2013 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Buffalo, New York.”

The VA calls the Golden Age Games the world’s largest sports competition for veterans ages 55 and older. The agency awarded the 27th annual Games to Buffalo in 2011, and competition was set to take place at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center, Erie Community College, Audubon Golf Course and other local venues.

The agency said the decision to cancel the event was not related to sequestration, the automatic budget cuts that took effect March 1. The VA is exempt from sequestration, but agency officials told Higgins that the general fiscal climate was the reason the event had to be put off.

However, similar veterans events are set to go on as scheduled in North Carolina, Florida, Colorado and California.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that more than 6.3 million people with Medicare saved over \$6.1 billion on prescription drugs because of the health care law.**

The Affordable Care Act makes Medicare prescription drug coverage (Part D) more affordable by gradually closing the gap in coverage where beneficiaries must pay the full cost of their prescriptions out of pocket. This gap is known as the donut hole.

People with Medicare in the donut hole now receive discounts when they purchase prescription drugs at a pharmacy or order them through the mail, until they reach the catastrophic coverage phase. The Affordable Care Act gave those who reached the donut hole in 2010 a one-time \$250 check, then began phasing in discounts and coverage for brand-name and generic prescription drugs beginning in 2011. The law will provide additional savings each year until the coverage gap is closed in 2020.

In 2013, the health care law increases the discounts and savings to 52.5 percent of the cost of most brand name drugs and 21 percent of the cost of covered generic drugs.

Also under the Affordable Care Act, those who choose to enroll in Medicare Advantage and Part D now have access to a wider range of high-quality plan choices, with more four- and five-star plans than were previously available. The Affordable Care Act continues to make Medicare more

secure, with new tools and enhanced authority to crack down on criminals who cheat the program.

For more information on how the Affordable Care Act closes the donut hole, please visit: <http://www.healthcare.gov/law/features/65-older/drug-discounts/>.

For state-by-state information on savings in the donut hole, please visit: <http://downloads.cms.gov/files/DonutHoleSavingsSummary-March2013.pdf>.

- **Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that about 71 million Americans in private health insurance plans received coverage for at least one free preventive health care service, such as a mammogram or flu shot, in 2011 and 2012 because of the Affordable Care Act.**

Additionally, an estimated 34 million Americans in traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans have received at least one preventive service, such as an annual wellness visit at no out of pocket cost because of the health care law.

Secretary Sebelius released the preventive services [report](#) as HHS celebrates the Affordable Care Act's third anniversary this week. The law is keeping down costs and providing more value for consumers and taxpayers through new consumer protections, holding insurance companies accountable, building a smarter health care system, and providing seniors with vital savings on their prescription drugs.

Some of the provisions in the Affordable Care Act includes:

- Eliminating lifetime dollar caps on essential health benefits, and phasing out annual caps. About 105 million Americans no longer have to fear their benefits will disappear when they need them most because their insurer put a lifetime cap on the amount it would pay.
- Prohibiting health insurance companies from denying coverage to children based on a pre-existing condition, such as asthma or cancer.
- And in 2014, it will be illegal for health insurance companies to deny coverage to any American or to charge more because of a pre-existing condition. No longer will 129 million Americans with health conditions have to fear seeing their premiums increased or getting locked out of the insurance market.

The law will also make it illegal for a health insurer to charge women more simply because they are women.

- **The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released preliminary national TB surveillance data for 2012. The new data show that after 20 consecutive years of declines, TB is at an all-time low in the United States.**

The study found that TB is more prevalent among racial/ethnic minorities and foreign-born individuals. Drug-resistant TB currently accounts for a small proportion of overall TB cases; however, it still remains a serious threat to our ability to treat and control TB, both in the U.S. and abroad.

To view the fact sheet, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/2013/TB-Snapshot2012FactSheet.pdf>.

- **Two percent of U.S. children between 6 and 17 are being diagnosed with some form of autism according to a new study by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services.**

The results are 0.8 percentage points higher than a similar study in 2007 (1.2 percent). The researchers attribute the increase to better detection rather than an expanding environmental threat.

The analysis found large numbers of children who were diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder years after their symptoms probably became apparent — especially older boys whose parents gauged their cases as mild.

The number of children diagnosed with autism has been climbing for more than two decades, though it is unclear to scientists whether children today are at greater biological risk than those in past generations. Much of the rise can be explained by a broadened definition of the condition, rising awareness of it and the fact that a formal diagnosis can lead to better access to services, experts say.

The study did not attempt to verify whether children whose parents identified them as autistic met the formal criteria for the disorder.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Dietary Supplements: FDA May Have Opportunities to Expand Its Use of Reported Health Problems to Oversee Products,” (GAO-13-244) on March 20, 2013.** This report examines the number of AERs FDA has received since 2008, their source, and types of products identified; actions FDA has taken to ensure that firms are complying with AER requirements; extent to which FDA is using AERs to initiate and support its consumer protection efforts; and extent to which FDA has implemented GAO's 2009 recommendations. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/653113.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **April 11, 2013**, to examine the Department of the Air Force in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2014 and the Future Years Defense Program; with the possibility of a closed session in SVC-217 following the open session.
- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **April 25, 2013**, to examine the Department of the Navy in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2014 and the Future Years Defense Program; with the possibility of a closed session in SVC-217 following the open session.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.1236** (introduced March 18, 2013): To amend title 10, United States Code, to require the inclusion of a behavioral health professional on any physical evaluation board that considers issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or other mental health condition was referred to the House Committee on Armed Services.
Sponsor: Representative Walter B. Jones, Jr. [NC-3]
- **H.R.1248** (introduced March 19, 2013): To amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to repeal certain limitations on health care benefits was referred to the House Committee on

Ways and Means.

Sponsor: Representative Erik Paulsen [MN-3]

- **H.R.1252** (introduced March 19, 2013): To amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for the participation of physical therapists in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative John Shimkus [IL-15]
- **H.R.1254** (introduced March 19, 2013): To repeal a requirement that new employees of certain employers be automatically enrolled in the employer's health benefits plan was referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.
Sponsor: Representative Richard Hudson [NC-8]
- **H.R.1263** (introduced March 19, 2013): To increase access to community behavioral health services for all Americans and to improve Medicaid reimbursement for community behavioral health services was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Doris O. Matsui [CA-6]
- **H.R.1286** (introduced March 20, 2013): To allow Americans to earn paid sick time so that they can address their own health needs and the health needs of their families was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and in addition to the Committees on House Administration, and Oversight and Government Reform.
Sponsor: Representative Rosa L. DeLauro [CT-3]
- **S.596** (introduced March 18, 2013): A bill to establish pilot projects under the Medicare program to provide incentives for home health agencies to furnish remote patient monitoring services that reduce expenditures under such program was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator John Thune [SD]
- **S.603** (introduced March 19, 2013): A bill to repeal the annual fee on health insurance providers enacted by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator John Barrasso [WY]
- **S.608** (introduced March 19, 2013): A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act and title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act to improve coverage for colorectal screening tests under Medicare and private health insurance coverage, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator Benjamin L. Cardin [MD]
- **S.610** (introduced March 19, 2013): A bill to amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to repeal certain limitations on health care benefits was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator Mike Johanns [NE].
- **S.612** (introduced March 19, 2013): A bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to remove social security account numbers from Medicare identification cards and communications provided to Medicare beneficiaries in order to protect Medicare beneficiaries from identity theft was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator Richard Durbin [IL]
- **S.626** (introduced March 20, 2013): A bill to de-link research and development incentives from drug prices for new medicines to treat HIV/AIDS and to stimulate greater sharing of scientific knowledge was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
Sponsor: Senator Bernard Sanders [VT]
- **S.627** (introduced March 20, 2013): A bill to provide incentives for investment in research and development for new medicines, to enhance access to new medicines, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
Sponsor: Senator Bernard Sanders [VT]

- **S.631** (introduced March 20, 2013): the *Healthy Families Act* was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Sponsor: Senator Tom Harkin [IA]

MEETINGS

- The National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health (NCDMPH) rescheduled [Learning in Disaster Health: A Continuing Education Workshop](#) from **April 2-3, 2013** to **Sept. 17-18, 2013**.
- The Global Health & Innovation Conference (GHIC) will be held **April 2-4, 2013**, in New Haven Conn. <http://www.uniteforsight.org/conference/>
- 10th Annual World Healthcare Congress will be held **April 8-10, 2013**, in Washington DC <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR13000/>
- The 16th Annual Conference on Vaccine Research will be held on **April 22-24, 2013**, in Baltimore, Md. <http://www.cvent.com/events/16th-annual-conference-on-vaccine-research/event-summary-db97bedd5ee041eeb09d971650f76be0.aspx>
- AAMA Presents: "3-in-1" Conference - Bringing Together Cardiovascular, Neuroscience & Oncology Leaders will be held on **April 10-12 2013**, in Las Vegas, Nev. <http://www.aameda.org/Conference/ACCA/ACCAMain.html>
- The AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held **Nov. 3-8, 2013**, in Seattle Wash. AMSUSMeeting.org
- The 29th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) will be held **Nov.7-9, 2013**, in Philadelphia, Pa. <http://www.istss.org/Home.htm>
- The AMIA 2013 Annual Symposium will be held on **Nov. 16-20, 2013**, in Washington DC. <http://www.amia.org/amia2013>
- The 2013 American Academy of Medical Administrators (AAMA) Annual Conference will be held on **Nov. 19 - 22, 2012**, Las Vegas, Nev. <http://www.aameda.org/Conference/Annual/AnnualMain.html>
- The Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) 2013: **Dec. 1-3, 2013**, in Chicago, Ill. http://www.rsna.org/Annual_Meeting.aspx
- The 2013 Special Operations Medical Association (SOMA) Conference will be held on **Dec. 14-17, 2012**, in Tampa, Fla. <http://www.specialoperationsmedicine.org/>

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