Welcome to Federal Health Update. This newsletter is a compilation of the latest news in the federal health care sector.

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- On March 21, 2019, the president signed into law S. 49, which designates the outstation of the Department of Veterans Affairs in North Ogden, Utah, as the Major Brent Taylor Vet Center Outstation.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- The Defense Health Agency is holding a webinar on April 4, 2019, to answer beneficiaries’ questions about TRICARE health care, pharmacy, and dental programs.

  Panelists include representatives from major TRICARE offices and programs, including:
  - TRICARE Health Plans
  - TRICARE Dental Plans
  - TRICARE Pharmacy Program

  The “Ask TRICARE” webinar is one of many TRICARE resources to answer beneficiaries’ questions about the TRICARE benefits. Visit TRICARE Publications for a look at more resources, from handbooks and brochures to fact sheets and newsletters.

  Beneficiaries may also review FAQs on the website. Search by keyword or by category to find answers to frequently asked TRICARE questions.
To register for the April 4 webinar, please visit:  
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1318026766988686817  Participants must be registered and in the webinar platform to submit a question electronically.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- A Department of Veterans Affairs researcher confirmed a connection between influenza and a significantly increased the risk of hospitalization for heart failure.

The study of more than 450,000 adults was led by Dr. Orly Vardeny, a clinical pharmacist and researcher at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center’s Center for Care Delivery and Outcomes Research and an associate professor of medicine at the University of Minnesota.

Vardeny and colleagues reviewed hospitalization data of adults ages 35-84 between October 2010 and September 2014 in four geographically diverse U.S. communities. Researchers correlated this information with reports of influenza activity from the federal Centers for Disease Control Surveillance Network.

“We hypothesized that increased influenza activity would be associated with an increase in hospitalizations for heart failure and myocardial infarction among adults in a community cohort,” Vardeny said.

Indeed, that was the case. Influenza activity was related to an increase in heart-failure hospitalizations across four influenza seasons in the four communities. Communities studied included Jackson, Mississippi; eight suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota; and two rural communities, Forsyth County, North Carolina; and Washington County, Maryland.

Researchers found a 5 percent monthly increase in influenza activity was associated with a 24 percent relative increase in heart failure hospitalization rates.

Study co-authors were from Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, Toronto General Hospital, the University of North Carolina, the University of Wisconsin and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released its Health Insurance Exchanges 2019 Open Enrollment Report, which summarizes health plan selections made on the individual Exchanges during the 2019 Open Enrollment Period (2019 OEP).

Key findings from this report include:

- Plan Selections: Approximately 11.4 million consumers selected or were automatically re-enrolled in an Exchange plan during the 2019 OEP in the 50 states, plus DC. This is a decrease from 11.8 million consumers during the 2018 OEP.

- New Consumers: Nationally, 24 percent of consumers with a plan selection during the 2019 OEP were new to the Exchange through which they enrolled. This is a decrease from 27 percent during the 2018 OEP.

- Average Premiums: Among all consumers in the 39 states that use the HealthCare.gov platform, the average premium before application of the tax credit was $612 in the 2019
OEP. This is a decrease from $621 in the 2018 OEP.

- **Financial Assistance:** Eighty-seven percent of consumers in states that use the HealthCare.gov platform received APTC in the 2019 OEP, compared to 85 percent in the 2018 OEP; the average premium after application of APTC for these consumers was $87 in the 2019 OEP, compared to $89 in the 2018 OEP.


- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced it will hold its Artificial Intelligence Health Outcomes Challenge in 2019.**

  The three-stage competition to accelerate artificial intelligence solutions to better predict health outcomes such as unplanned hospital and skilled nursing facility admissions and adverse events for potential use by the Innovation Center in testing innovative payment and service delivery models.

  CMS is partnering with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation to award up to $1.65 million to selected participants during the three stages of the Challenge.

  **The Goals of the Challenge** - The CMS Artificial Intelligence Health Outcomes Challenge is an opportunity for innovators to demonstrate how artificial intelligence tools, such as deep learning and neural networks, can be used to predict unplanned hospital and skilled nursing facility admissions and adverse events for potential use by the Innovation Center in testing innovative payment and service delivery models under the authority of section 1115A of the Social Security Act. The Challenge prioritizes explainable artificial intelligence solutions to help front-line clinicians understand and trust artificial intelligence-driven data feedback to target scarce resources and improve the quality of care.

  **The Challenge Structure** - The Challenge consists of three stages.

  - During the **Launch Stage**, participants will submit an application via [ai.cms.gov](http://ai.cms.gov) and provide information about their proposed solution. Up to 20 participants will be selected to advance to Stage 1.
  
  - During **Stage 1**, participants will design and test their proposed solution using certain Medicare claims data sets. Up to five participants will be selected to advance to Stage 2 and will each be awarded up to $80,000.
  
  - During **Stage 2**, finalists will be able to request additional Medicare claims data and refine their solutions. The grand prize winner in Stage 2 will be awarded up to $1 million and the runner up will be awarded up to $250,000.

  **Challenge Timing** - The Challenge will run for approximately one year. The Launch Stage will run from March 2019 through June 2019. Stage 1 will run from summer 2019 – fall 2019. Stage 2 will run from winter 2019 through spring 2020 and the winner will be announced in April 2020. (Dates are subject to change.)

  **For More information** - Learn more about the CMS Artificial Intelligence Health Outcomes Challenge at [ai.cms.gov](http://ai.cms.gov). To read the official public announcement for the Challenge, visit [go.cms.gov/AI](http://go.cms.gov/AI).

### HILL HEARINGS

- The House Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **April 2, 2019**, to examine the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization budget request for the Departments of the Army and Air Force.
- The Senate Special Committee on Aging will hold a hearing on **April 2, 2019**, to examine Alzheimer's, focusing on new directions in biomedical research and caregiving.
- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **April 2, 2019**, to examine Army modernization in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2020 and the future years defense program.
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **April 3, 2019**, to examine the Veterans Affairs fiscal year 2020 budget request.
- The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of Defense will hold a hearing on **April 3, 2019**, to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2020 for the Defense Health Program.
- The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies will hold a hearing on **April 4, 2019**, to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2020 for the Department of Health and Human Services.

### LEGISLATION

- **H.R.1983** (introduced March 28, 2019): To reauthorize and extend funding for community health centers and the National Health Service Corps was referred to the House Committee on Appropriations. Sponsor: Representative Tom O’Halleran [D-AZ-1]
- **H.R.1920** (introduced March 27, 2019): A bill to amend title XIX of the Social Security Act to provide a higher Federal matching rate for increased expenditures under Medicaid for mental and behavioral health services, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Joseph P. Kennedy, III [D-MA-4]
- **S.913** (introduced March 27, 2019): A bill to require group health plans and health insurance issuers offering health insurance coverage to disclose cost information to enrollees in such plans or coverage was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Sponsor: Senator Mike. Braun [R-IN]:
- **S.902** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the non-applicability of non-Department of Veterans Affairs covenants not to compete to the appointment of physicians in the Veterans Health Administration, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Sponsor: Senator John Boozman [R-AR]
- **H.R.1887** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to establish a National Institute of Nutrition within the National Institutes of Health, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Tim Ryan [D-OH-13]:
- **H.R.1884** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to amend the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to improve affordability of, undo sabotage with respect to, and increase access to
health insurance coverage, and for other purposes was Referred to the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Labor. Sponsor: Representative Frank Pallone, Jr. [D-NJ-6]

- **H.R.1879** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to amend titles XIX and XXI of the Social Security Act to provide for 12-month continuous enrollment of individuals under the Medicaid program and Children’s Health Insurance Program, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Joseph P. Kennedy, III [D-MA-4]

- **H.R.1870** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to expand affordability of health insurance for working families was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. Sponsor: Representative Susan Wild [D-PA-7]

- **S.873** (introduced March 26, 2019): A bill to amend titles XIX and XXI of the Social Security Act to provide for 12-month continuous enrollment under Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Finance. Sponsor: Senator Sherrod Brown [D-OH]

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**MEETINGS**

- The 9th Annual Heroes of Military Medicine Awards Dinner will be held on **May 9, 2019**, in Washington DC. [https://www.hjfcp3.org/heroes-dinner/](https://www.hjfcp3.org/heroes-dinner/)


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If you need further information on any item in the *Federal Health Update*, please contact Kate Theroux at (703) 447-3257 or by e-mail at katetheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com.