

Federal Health Update

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ktheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **On Sept. 11, 2014, the House passed H.R. 3522, Employee Health Care Protection Act of 2013.** This legislation authorizes health insurance issuers to continue to offer for sale current group health insurance coverage in satisfaction of the minimum essential health insurance coverage requirement, and for other purposes.
- **The Hill reports that House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) said that the House is still on track to vote next week on a funding bill to avert a government shutdown**

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Department of Defense released the quarterly suicide report (QSR), for the first quarter of calendar year 2014.**

The report summarizes suicide counts for all services and components. During the months of January through March of this year, there were 74 suicides among service members in the active component, 24 suicides among service members in the reserves, and 22 suicides among service members in the National Guard.

The report also shows 2013 annual counts and annual rates as published last month in the 2013 4th Quarter DoD QSR, as well as 2012 annual counts and annual rates as published in the DoD

Suicide Event Report (DoDSER) Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report. The QSR is intended to communicate the department's suicide data on a routine and frequent basis.

A breakdown of first quarter, 2014, suicide counts and resources for service members and their families, who may be facing challenges, can be found at:

http://www.suicideoutreach.org/SuicideData/quarterly_reports.htm.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is introducing a plan to incorporate Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP) as a way to bridge the gap between veterans' separation from service and successful civilian employment outcomes.**

In general, ALP learning is a non-traditional form of education that employs, and incorporates, varied learning styles. Individuals pursue intensive or self-paced learning in curricula that focus on developing career and industry skills. The ALP form of learning takes advantage of technologies, blended learning environments and innovative curricula that support the President's priority to ensure that America's veterans find meaningful civilian employment.

Preliminary research by VA which focused on information technology (IT) training as an in-demand, high-growth industry, suggests that accelerated learning could provide a viable alternative to traditional education that may yield competitive job skills and employment opportunities for some veterans. VA is developing a strategy to leverage accelerated learning and test its effectiveness for veterans in projects over the next two years, targeting communities where VA can best support veterans and transitioning Servicemembers.

Next steps include additional research and evaluation of these non-traditional modes of education. Evaluation of ALP performance requires a baseline to understand veterans as they enter a program, their current employment status, and the types of jobs they qualify for prior to ALP completion. Capturing this information requires partnerships between employers and ALP providers, along with participation of Veterans in pre- and post-program data collection. VA will continue to work with education innovators and employers to share leading practices and define the economic outcomes that indicate long-term success for veteran and transitioning service member participants.

- **Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald commemorated one hundred years of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Life Insurance program with employees at the VA Life Insurance Center in Philadelphia, Pa.**

The milestone honors the enactment of the War Risk Insurance Act, Sept. 2, 1914, which is the foundation for VA life insurance protection.

Over the last century, VA has provided valuable life insurance protection to more than 57 million Servicemembers and Veterans during times of war and peace, from World War I through the present conflicts. Today, VA boasts the 9th largest life insurance enterprise in the nation.

VA directly administers six life insurance programs and supervises the [Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance](#) (SGLI) and the [Veterans' Group Life Insurance](#) (VGLI) programs that provide \$1.3 trillion in insurance coverage.

Additionally, VA life insurance ranks as one of the best customer call center satisfaction scores in the federal government, according to the American Customer Service Index. On average, VA answers approximately 2,200 insurance-specific calls a day and completes 85 percent of those

requests while on the phone.

To learn more about the 100th milestone, check out the video and infographics here:
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/insurance100.asp>.

- **Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald held a press conference on Sept.8 to outline his plan to address the problems facing the VA and restore the trust of veterans over the next 60 days.**

His plan, named “The Road to Veterans Day,” is three-pronged.

1. Restore the trust by recommitting to the VA’s core values, rebuilding relationships with VA stakeholders, and simplifying communications to increase transparency.
2. Improve our service delivery by examining current practices and identifying ways to improve. This includes using digital technology to improve VA systems, better aligning and simplifying service to veterans.
3. Engage federal, state, and private sectors to partner and capture best practices, including the veteran service organizations and military service organizations, with state governments, private sectors.

He closed his prepared remarks with the following statement:

“In the end, the VA exists to serve them, to serve veterans, whether it’s those veterans I had breakfast with at the Blinded Veterans of America Convention who told me that the VA care and treatment has given them the ability to climb mountains, ride horses, and accomplished things they never expected when they were first injured; or those veterans I met when I was in Phoenix, who were being scheduled for their next appointment. I’m convinced that we are going to be able to come out of this process better able to meet the needs of our veterans because we will be looking at everything we do, every service we provide, every customer interaction we have through the eyes of the veteran.”

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell awarded \$60 million in Navigator grant awards to 90 organizations in states with federally-facilitated and state partnership Marketplaces.**

These awards support preparation and outreach activities in year two of Marketplace enrollment and build on lessons learned from last year.

According to a recent outside [survey](#), a variety of assisters, including Navigators, in both state-based and federally-facilitated Marketplaces were responsible for helping an estimated 10.6 million consumers apply for coverage in Marketplace plans, Medicaid, or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) during the first Open Enrollment period. Assisters tend to help those consumers in communities with the most challenging or complicated enrollments.

In addition to helping eligible individuals and their families enroll in coverage, Navigators help consumers compare their health coverage options including helping them determine whether they are eligible for public programs such as Medicaid and CHIP and guide consumers- many of whom have never had insurance before- on accessing and using their new coverage, among other important functions.

These awards build on lessons learned from the first year of Marketplace operations.

- Navigator grantees must maintain a physical presence in the Marketplace service-area, so that consumers can easily access face-to-face assistance.
- Navigator grantees are required to be trained on and comply with strict security and privacy standards to ensure that consumers' personally identifiable information (PII) is protected, as was the case last year. In no case will Navigators obtain a consumer's PII without the consumer's consent.
- In addition to quarterly and annual reporting, Navigators will also be required to submit to HHS weekly progress reports detailing their progress and activities in the communities they serve.
- Based on feedback from the assister community, HHS is incorporating new elements into this year's required training, such as a course on advanced Marketplace issues with detailed information on topics such as how to help college-age students enroll in coverage and re-enrollment. HHS is committed to providing Navigators with on-going technical assistance and training opportunities throughout the year.

In addition to Navigators, Marketplaces make other resources available to consumers to help them access Marketplace coverage, such as certified application counselors, non-navigator assistance personnel (also known as in-person assisters), and agents and brokers. Consumers in federally-facilitated and state partnership Marketplaces can visit [Find Local Help](#) to find assistance in their area.

For a list of HHS Navigator awardees or more information about Navigators and other Marketplace resources, please visit:

<http://cciio.cms.gov/programs/exchanges/assistance.html>

- **Millions of infants, children and adolescents in the United States did not receive key clinical preventive services, according to a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).**

Clinical preventive services are various forms of important medical or dental care that support healthy development. They are delivered by doctors, dentists, nurses and allied health providers in clinical settings. These services prevent and detect conditions and diseases in their earlier, more treatable stages, significantly reducing the risk of illness, disability, early death, and expensive medical care.

The CDC report focuses on 11 clinical preventive services: prenatal breastfeeding counseling, newborn hearing screening and follow-up, developmental screening, lead screening, vision screening, hypertension screening, use of dental care and preventive dental services, human papillomavirus vaccination, tobacco use screening and cessation assistance, chlamydia screening and reproductive health services.

The findings offer a baseline assessment of the use of selected services prior to 2012, before or shortly after implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Sample findings include:

- In 2007, parents of almost eight in 10 (79 percent) children aged 10-47 months reported that they were not asked by healthcare providers to complete a formal screen for developmental delays in the past year.
- In 2009, more than half (56 percent) of children and adolescents did not visit the dentist in the past year and nearly nine of 10 (86 percent) children and adolescents did not receive a dental sealant or a topical fluoride application in the past year.
- Nearly half (47 percent) of females aged 13-17 years had not received their recommended first dose of HPV vaccine in 2011.

- Approximately one in three (31 percent) outpatient clinic visits made by 11-21 year-olds during 2004–2010 had no documentation of tobacco use status; eight of 10 (80 percent) of those who screened positive for tobacco use did not receive any cessation assistance.
- Approximately one in four (24 percent) outpatient clinic visits for preventive care made by 3-17 year olds during 2009-2010 had no documentation of blood pressure measurement.

The report reveals large disparities in the receipt of clinical preventive services. For example, uninsured children are not as likely as insured children to receive these services and Hispanic children were less likely than non-Hispanic children to have reported vision screening.

For more information on the report, visit www.cdc.gov/childpreventiveservices.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Veterans Affairs: Better Understanding Needed to Enhance Services to Veterans Readjusting to Civilian Life,” (GAO-14-676) on Sept. 10, 2014.** This report examines what is known about the extent to which veterans experience difficulties during their readjustment to civilian life; and how VA assists veterans in their readjustment, as well as what challenges and opportunities exist. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665725.pdf>
- **The GAO published “Military Personnel: DoD Needs to Take Further Actions to Prevent Sexual Assault during Initial Military Training,” (GAO-14-806) on Sept. 9, 2014.** This report examines the extent to which the Air Force implemented the recommendations to better prevent, investigate, and respond to sexual assault during basic training and evaluated the effectiveness of actions taken; and the military services have a process to share lessons learned and have data to oversee their efforts to prevent sexual assault and related misconduct during initial military training. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665632.pdf>
- **The Institutes of Medicine published “Implications of Health Literacy for Public Health-Workshop Summary,” on Sept. 10, 2014.** The report features the presentation of a commissioned paper on health literacy activities underway in public health organizations and examines the implications of health literacy for the mission and essential services of public health. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2014/Implications-of-Health-Literacy-for-Public-Health.aspx>

HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing on **Sept. 17, 2014**, to review the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.5436** (introduced Sept. 9, 2014): To amend the Public Health Services Act to provide research, training, and navigator services to youth and young adults on the verge of aging out of the secondary educational system, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Christopher P. Gibson [NY-19]
- **H.R.5439** (introduced Sept. 10, 2014): To direct the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to publish a health advisory and submit reports with respect to Microcystins in drinking water was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Marcy Kaptur [OH-9]
- **H.J.RES.124** (introduced Sept. 9, 2014): the *Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2015* was referred to the Committee on Appropriations, and in addition to the Committee on the Budget
Sponsor: Representative Harold Rogers [KY-5]
- **H.RES.717** (introduced Sept. 9, 2014): Providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3522) to authorize health insurance issuers to continue to offer for sale current group health insurance coverage in satisfaction of the minimum essential health insurance coverage requirement, and for other purposes was resolution Agreed to by recorded vote: 233 - 187.
Sponsor: Representative Michael C. Burgess [TX-26].
- **S.2783** (introduced Sept. 10, 2014): A bill to establish a demonstration program requiring the utilization of Value-Based Insurance Design to demonstrate that reducing the copayments or coinsurance charged to Medicare beneficiaries for selected high-value prescription medications and clinical services can increase their utilization and ultimately improve clinical outcomes and lower health care expenditures was referred to the Committee on Finance.
Sponsor: Senator John Thune [SD]

MEETINGS

- The AUSA 2014 Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held **Oct. 13-15, 2014**, in Washington DC. <http://www.ausa.org/meetings/2014/Pages/AnnualMeeting.aspx>
 - The 30th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) will be held **Nov.6-8, 2014**, in Miami, Fla. <http://www.istss.org/MeetingsEvents.htm>
 - The AMIA 2014 Annual Symposium will be held on **Nov. 15-19, 2014**, in Washington DC. <http://www.amia.org/amia2014>
 - AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held **Dec. 2-5, 2014**, in Washington, DC <http://amsusmeetings.org>
 - The 100th Annual Meeting of Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) 2014 will be held **Dec. 5-9, 2014**, in Chicago, Ill. http://www.rsna.org/Annual_Meeting.aspx
 - The 2014 Special Operations Medical Association (SOMA) Science Assembly will be held on **Dec. 8-11, 2014**, in Tampa, Fla. <http://www.specialoperationsmedicine.org/Pages/scientificassembly.aspx>
 - The AAMA 2015: The National Summit of Medical Administrators will be held on **Jan. 19-21, 2015**, in Clearwater, Fla. <http://aameda.org/p/cm/ld/fid=159>
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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.