

# Federal Health Update

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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

- **Congress finally came to an agreement on Oct. 16 to pass a continuing resolution to reopen the government until Jan. 15, 2014, and increase the debt limit until Feb. 7, 2014.** Standard & Poor's estimates that the government shutdown cost the U.S. economy \$24 billion.

## MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Department of Defense posted a statement from Secretary Chuck Hagel to DoD personnel on the reopening of the government.**

*Today the Department of Defense is resuming normal operations across the world, now that Congress has finally restored funding for DoD and the rest of the federal government. This manufactured crisis was an unwelcome and unnecessary distraction from our critical work of keeping the country safe.*

*I know that each of your lives has been disrupted and affected in different ways. I regret the impact that this shutdown had on so many of our civilian personnel, particularly those who I was previously unable to recall from emergency furlough.*

*Starting today, we will be welcoming all of our civilians back to their normal duties. To those returning from furlough: know that the work you perform is incredibly valued by your military teammates and by me. I appreciate your professionalism and your patience during this difficult*

*period of time, which came on top of last summer's sequestration-related furloughs. Your managers will have more information about this, but I can assure you that you will be paid in full for the time you were furloughed during the shutdown.*

*Now that this latest budget crisis has come to an end, we have an opportunity to return to focusing on the critical work of this department. Unfortunately, Congress did not end the budget uncertainty that has cast such a shadow of uncertainty over this department for much of the year. In the months ahead, they will have an opportunity to do so. My hope is that they will realize that these kinds of crises do great damage to our people, our national security, our economy, and America's standing in the world. Congress has a responsibility to govern, and it must fulfill those basic responsibilities in order to keep our country strong.*

▪ **TRICARE published a summary of the mobile sites and applications available to beneficiaries:**

- The first mobile tool people should know about is the mobile version of TRICARE.mil, accessible on mobile devices including tablets and smartphones. Simply type [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil) into a mobile device's browser to get benefit and contact information. Beneficiaries can download educational materials, view episodes of TRICARE TV, listen to podcasts, read TRICARE news, find contact information for different regions and plans, submit benefit questions and access costs, plans, referrals and other information specific to their plan.
- Each of the TRICARE regional contractors also has their own mobile site or app. Health Net, the North Region contractor, operates [www.hnfs.com/go/mobile](http://www.hnfs.com/go/mobile), which allows beneficiaries to locate TRICARE-authorized providers and access resources including contact information and information about benefits, claims and eligibility. The South Region contractor, Humana Military, has a mobile site at [m.humana-military.com](http://m.humana-military.com). Humana Military Mobile offers links to a provider locator, a search tool for urgent care centers and eligibility and plan information.
- In the West Region, UnitedHealth Military & Veterans has a mobile app for mobile devices called "OptimizeMe." This app encourages healthy lifestyles by letting users challenge other users to health and fitness goals on their smartphones. OptimizeMe lets users track their own progress and post the results to Facebook. Beneficiaries can download OptimizeMe from iTunes or the Google Play store.
- The TRICARE pharmacy contractor Express Scripts, Inc. (ESI) offers both a mobile site, [www.express-scripts.com/mobile](http://www.express-scripts.com/mobile), and an app called Express Rx. These allow beneficiaries to get benefit information, start home delivery of their prescriptions, check the status of their order, order prescription refills and find a nearby network pharmacy. They even have information about drugs and potential side effects. Beneficiaries must register with ESI before using the mobile site by going to [www.express-scripts.com/activate](http://www.express-scripts.com/activate).
- The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) also offers a mobile app (for Android phones) called milConnect Mobile. The app allows beneficiaries to locate identification card-issuing facilities, find contact information for TRICARE regional contractors and review frequently asked questions. Beneficiaries can download milConnect Mobile from the Google Play store.

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a statement regarding the reopening of the federal Government:**

*“With the shutdown over, we are all very grateful that the Nov. 1 benefit checks will go out to approximately 5 million Veterans and other beneficiaries as scheduled,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “We at VA are working quickly to resume normal operations in order to fulfill our solemn obligation – to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits and services they have earned through their service. I want to thank all of our VA employees for their dedication and resolve during this difficult period.”*

*“During the government shutdown, VA medical centers, clinics, and other health services remained open. Due to the shutdown, VA claims processors were unable to continue working 20 hours of overtime per month to reduce the backlog of claims, overtime that has helped VA significantly reduce the disability claims backlog by more than 190,000 claims over the last six months. Mandatory overtime will resume immediately and will continue as planned through Nov. 16, at a minimum.*

*“In the coming weeks and months, we will fight hard to regain ground lost as a result of the government shutdown. We remain committed to eliminating the disability claims backlog in 2015.”*

## GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the start of the Medicare Open Enrollment, which runs Oct.15 – Dec. 7, 2013.**

CMS encourages people with Medicare to review their current health and prescription drug coverage options for 2014. Medicare’s Open Enrollment is not part of the Affordable Care Act’s new Health Insurance Marketplace, and people with Medicare do not need to do anything with Marketplace plans.

CMS announced last month that the average Medicare Advantage (MA) premium is projected to be \$32.60. Earlier this year, CMS estimated that the average basic Medicare prescription drug premium plan in 2014 was projected to be \$31 per month, holding steady for four years in a row. Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, average MA premiums are down by 9.8 percent. The deductible for standard Part D plans will decline by \$15 in 2014 to \$310. Prescription drug and health plan quality continues to improve as over one-third of MA contracts will receive four or more stars, which is an increase from 28 percent last year. CMS is allowing 5-star Medicare health and prescription drug plans to enroll beneficiaries at any time during the year.

Medicare plans’ coverage options and costs can change each year, and Medicare beneficiaries should evaluate their current coverage and choices, and select the plan that best meets their needs. If people with Medicare are satisfied with their current coverage and feel it will meet their needs for 2014, they do not need to do anything.

For more information on Medicare Open Enrollment and to compare benefits and prices of 2014 Medicare health and drug plans, and view state-by-state fact sheets, please visit: [www.cms.gov/Center/Special-Topic/Open-Enrollment-Center.html](http://www.cms.gov/Center/Special-Topic/Open-Enrollment-Center.html).

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the obesity rate among U.S. adults in 2012 remains statistically the same as it was in 2010.**

In 2012, about 34.9 percent of the people in this country were obese, which is roughly 35 pounds over a healthy weight. That is not significantly different from the 35.7 percent who were obese in 2010.

In both 2010 and 2012 about 78 million adults were obese; more than 50 million of those were

white, according to the latest statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The prevalence of obesity increased dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s after being relatively stable in the USA between 1960 and 1980 when about 15 percent of people fell into the category.

## REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Medicare Information Technology: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Needs to Pursue a Solution for Removing Social Security Numbers from Cards,” (GAO-13-761) on Oct. 17, 2013.** This report assesses actions CMS has taken to identify and implement IT solutions for removing SSNs from Medicare cards; and determine whether CMS's ongoing IT modernization initiatives could facilitate SSN removal efforts. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/657709.pdf>

## HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Committee on Aging will hold a hearing on **Oct. 23, 2013**, to examine the future of long-term care policy.

## LEGISLATION

- There was no legislation proposed this week.

## MEETINGS

- The AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held **Nov. 3-8, 2013**, in Seattle Wash. [AMSUSMeeting.org](http://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 Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) 2013: **Dec. 1-3, 2013**, in Chicago, Ill. [http://www.rsna.org/Annual\\_Meeting.aspx](http://www.rsna.org/Annual_Meeting.aspx)
- The 2013 Special Operations Medical Association (SOMA) Conference will be held on **Dec. 14-17, 2013**, in Tampa, Fla. <http://www.specialoperationsmedicine.org/>
- The AAMA 2014 Conference will be held on **Feb. 25-28, 2014**, in Las Vegas Nev. <http://aameda.org/p/cm/ld/fid=98>
- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 1, 2014**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org>

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