

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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ktheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **The House and Senate are in recess over Thanksgiving week.**
- **On Nov. 24, 2014, President Obama announced that Secretary Chuck Hagel would be stepping down as Defense Secretary.**

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Congressional Budget Office published “Options for Reducing the Deficit: 2015 to 2024”, which suggests 79 measures the U.S. government could implement to manage debt and spending levels over the next decade.**

The report lists budget policy options for defense, energy, healthcare, tax and social security programs.

Recommendations for the Defense Department include capping military pay increases, implementing changes in military and civilian workforce, and modifying Tricare enrollment fees or cost-sharing rules.

The report also proposed an alternative inflation measurement tool to calculate parameters of social security and other mandatory government programs.

CBO says its deficit-reduction methods are based on various spending bills as well as on

proposals from both public and private sectors.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **On Nov. 24, 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has formally removed Sharon Helman, the director of the Phoenix VA Healthcare System, from federal service.**

This decision followed an investigation by the VA Office of Inspector General in which allegations of lack of oversight and other misconduct were substantiated. This removal action underscores VA's commitment to hold leaders accountable and ensure that veterans have access to quality and timely care.

VA will name a new director in Phoenix as quickly as possible. To ensure continuity of care for veterans and leadership for VA employees during the recruitment period, Glenn Grippen has been designated interim Phoenix VA Healthcare System director.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) announced it has issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new Medical Appointment Scheduling System (MASS).**

The new MASS technology will help improve access to care for Veterans by providing schedulers with state-of-the-art, management-based scheduling software. The new system will replace a legacy scheduling system that has been in use at VA since 1985. VA's acquisition approach for the new scheduling solution remains full and open; any qualified vendor may compete. Potential bidders are not required to have prior experience working with VA. Proposals are due on Jan. 9, 2015.

VA released a draft "Performance Work Statement" to maximize industry and stakeholder input. The feedback received from industry has been used to refine the requirements included in the final RFP.

The RFP requires industry to demonstrate technical capabilities via two methods; submission of a written proposal and participation in a structured product demonstration to evaluators (which include VA scheduling staff). VA expects to award the contract by the spring of 2015. The selected bidder will be tasked to provide a system that focuses on an achievable schedule to deliver core capabilities to all VA medical facilities within the first two years of the contract. Remaining capabilities will be implemented nationally in a series of incremental enhancements throughout the contract period of performance. In addition to industry and stakeholder engagement, VA officials also worked with Veteran Service Organizations and the Northern Virginia Technology Council to better understand the needs of veterans

Information about the RFP may be found at <http://go.usa.gov/sVDP>. The RFP number is VA118-15-R-0715.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced partnerships with Westfield Shopping Centers, The National Community Pharmacists Association and XO Group Inc., parent company of The Knot, The Nest and The Bump, to promote the Health Insurance Marketplace in conjunction with Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday.**

The partners will connect shoppers with information about affordable health insurance options through the Health Insurance Marketplace throughout the open enrollment period ending

February 15.

Consumers can sign up for an affordable health plan that meets their needs and fits their budget at HealthCare.gov. Many may even qualify for financial assistance. Open Enrollment in the Marketplace runs through Feb. 15, 2015. Health coverage can start as soon as Jan. 1, 2015 for consumers who sign up by Dec. 15, 2014. Consumers who have already received health coverage through the Marketplace can renew their coverage any time before Dec. 15.

Westfield Shopping Centers

Westfield, one of the world's leading shopping center companies, has agreed to allow navigators and assistors to provide information about the Health Insurance Marketplace in some of its U.S. shopping centers during the open enrollment period. Westfield will provide tables, chairs and other necessary items for HHS navigators and assistors to provide education and outreach to consumers. Westfield Shopping Centers will also include information about enrollment services on their website and on-site to help people find the tables set up for enrollment.

National Community Pharmacists Association

The National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), representing the pharmacist owners, managers, and employees of nearly 23,000 independent community pharmacies across the United States, will provide community pharmacies across the country materials and information on open enrollment, so the community pharmacies can educate their customers and community.

XO Group Inc.

XO Group, is the premier consumer internet and media company devoted to weddings, pregnancy and everything in between, informed couples of the Health Insurance Marketplace on its websites, [The Knot](#), [The Nest](#) and [The Bump](#), where members who are planning a wedding, starting a home and having a baby, may be looking for a new insurance option or qualify for a special enrollment period. Content featuring information on open enrollment includes, [A Message from Michelle Obama](#), [Three Reasons to #GetCovered](#) and [The #1 Thing to Do on Cyber Monday to Stay Healthy](#).

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “*Vaccine Injury Compensation: Most Claims Took Multiple Years and Many Were Settled through Negotiation*,” (GAO-15-142) on Nov. 21, 2014.** This report examines how long it has taken to adjudicate claims and how claims have been adjudicated; the changes to the vaccine injury table; and how the balance of and spending from the Vaccine Injury Compensation Trust Fund have changed, among other objectives. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/667136.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing on **Dec. 3, 2014**, on VA's caregiver program, assessing current prospects and future possibilities.
- The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on *Economic Opportunity* will hold a hearing on **Dec. 10, 2014**, to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

LEGISLATION

- There was no legislation proposed this week.

MEETINGS

- 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>
 - The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 7, 2015** in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org>
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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.