

# Federal Health Update

DEC. 6, 2013

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

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***The Federal Health Update will not be published on Dec. 13 and 27, 2013.***

## **EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS**

- **The Senate is in recess until Dec. 9, 2013.**
- **On Dec. 2, 2013, President Obama signed into law the PEPFAR Stewardship and Oversight Act of 2013.**

This legislation reauthorizes and extends a few authorities related to the efforts to combat global HIV/AIDS, including the limitation on U.S. contributions to the Global Fund; funding allocation requirements for bilateral global HIV/AIDS assistance; and annual reports that, among other things, require establishing targets for HIV prevention, treatment, and care on a country-by-country basis

Ten years ago, HIV/AIDS was devastating the health and wellbeing of millions of individuals in communities across Africa and in other resource-poor countries around the world. Through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), there has been extraordinary progress in reducing new HIV infections and providing life-saving care and treatment to those who are living with HIV/AIDS around the world.

- **On Dec. 1, 2013, the Obama Administration provided a progress and performance report on [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov), which has been mired in technical challenges making it**

**difficult for Americans to use the federal health care exchange.**

The report details the substantial progress that has been made to improve and stabilize HealthCare.gov, including hundreds of software fixes and numerous hardware upgrades. The new management system and instrumentation have helped improve site stability, lower the error rating below 1 percent, increase capacity to allow 50,000 concurrent users to simultaneously use the site and will help drive continuous improvement on the site.

For more details, please visit: <http://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Press-Releases/2013-Press-Releases-Items/2013-12-01.html>.

## MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **On Dec. 3, 2013, the Department of Defense announced that President Obama has appointed Christine Fox as acting deputy secretary of defense, effective Dec. 5.**

Fox has been director, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation since Nov. 3, 2009. A Presidential appointee confirmed by the United States Senate, she serves as the principal staff assistant to the Secretary of Defense for analyzing and evaluating plans, programs, and budgets in relation to U.S. defense objectives and resource constraints.

Fox possesses nearly three decades of experience as an analyst and research manager focusing on defense issues, particularly operations. She formerly served as the President of the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), a Federally Funded Research and Development Center, and as the scientific analyst to the Chief of Naval Operations.

Fox served as a member of NASA's Return to Flight Task Group, chartered by the NASA Administrator to certify the recommendations made by the Columbia Accident Investigation Board. Ms. Fox was a member of the Advisory Board of the Applied Physics Laboratory, University of Washington from 2007 until 2009.

Fox holds an M.S. in Applied Mathematics, George Mason University, and a B.S. in Mathematics, George Mason University.

- **The TRICARE website launched a new feature on the front page to make it easier for beneficiaries to access customer service features.**

The TRICARE.mil home page has a new "I want to..." section offering beneficiaries a gateway to links that help them manage their health care from prescriptions to enrollments and much more.

The "I want to..." section of [TRICARE.mil](http://TRICARE.mil) launched Dec. 1. The redesigned home page focuses on tools for beneficiaries to manage their health care benefits. "I want to..." has quick links to secure login portals for more than a dozen customer service features including:

- Managing prescriptions
- Enrolling or purchasing a plan
- Finding a doctor
- Updating personal information
- Filing or checking on a claim
- Paying a bill

- Booking appointments at a military hospital or clinic
- Changing a primary care physician
- Viewing military health records

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase in their monthly payments beginning Jan. 1, 2014.**

For the first time, payments will not be rounded down to the nearest dollar. Until this year, that was required by law. Veterans and survivors will see additional cents included in their monthly compensation benefit payment.

For veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent. The full rates are available on the Internet at [www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp).

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits.

Under federal law, cost-of-living adjustments for VA's compensation and pension must match those for Social Security benefits. The last adjustment was in January 2013 when the Social Security benefits rate increased 1.7 percent.

In fiscal year 2013, VA provided over \$59 billion in compensation benefits to nearly 4 million veterans and survivors, and over \$5 billion in pension benefits to more than 515,000 veterans and survivors.

## GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced \$55.5 million in funding awarded in FY 2013 to strengthen training for health professionals and increase the size of the nation's health care workforce.**

More than 270 grants will address health workforce needs in nursing, public health, behavioral health, health workforce development, and dentistry. The grants are managed by HHS' Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

A majority of the funding, \$45.4 million, will support nursing workforce development in the following areas:

- Increasing the number of nurse faculty (\$22.1 million) — provides low-interest loans to nurses to train to become faculty and loan cancellation for service as faculty.
- Improving nursing diversity (\$5.2 million) — expands educational opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities who are underrepresented among registered nurses.
- Increasing nurse anesthetist traineeships (\$2.2 million) — supports nurse anesthetist programs to provide traineeships to licensed registered nurses enrolled as full-time students in a master's or doctoral nurse anesthesia program.
- Promoting inter-professional collaborative practice (\$6.7 million) — brings together

inter-professional teams of nurses and other health professionals to develop and implement innovative practice models for providing care.

- Supporting advanced nursing education (\$9.2 million) — funds advanced nursing programs that support registered nurses in becoming nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and other practice nurses.

Funding also supports training of doctoral-level psychologists to address the behavioral health needs of vulnerable and underserved populations (\$2.4 million); accredited residency programs in preventive medicine and public health (\$3 million); and four health workforce research centers (\$1.4 million) to improve understanding of both local and national health workforce needs.

An additional \$3.1 million will help state designated dental health professional shortage areas develop and implement innovative programs to address dental workforce needs. States must match at least 40 percent of the grant funding or provide equivalent support.

For a list of grant awards, go to

[www.hrsa.gov/about/news/2013tables/healthprofessions](http://www.hrsa.gov/about/news/2013tables/healthprofessions).

- **HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that Kim Gillan will be appointed Region VIII Director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.**

Kim Gillan most recently served as director of Workforce Development & Training Programs at Montana State University, where she was responsible for the strategic and operation direction of workforce-related programs for the university. Concurrently, Gillan served as a state senator and Senate Minority Whip after serving as a representative and as House Minority Leader in Montana.

With more than 16 years of public service experience in the Montana legislature, Gillan has successfully secured bipartisan support for legislation to extend health insurance coverage for autism, diabetes, and expanding consumer protections, and has helped pass legislation supportive of health care workforce expansion.

Gillan received a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles and a Master's in Regional Planning from Cornell University.

- **The number of people worldwide living with dementia could more than triple by 2050, a new Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) report reveals.**

Currently, an estimated 44 million people worldwide have dementia. That number is expected to reach 76 million in 2030 and 135 million by 2050. The ADI policy brief will be released at an upcoming G8 Dementia Summit in London, England.

The projected number of people with dementia in 2050 is now 17 percent higher than ADI estimated in the 2009 World Alzheimer Report.

The new policy brief also predicts a shift in the worldwide distribution of dementia cases, from the richest nations to middle- and low-income countries. By 2050, 71 percent of people with dementia will live in middle- and low-income nations, according to the experts.

Research must become a global priority if improvements are to be made to the quality and coverage of dementia care. Equal emphasis should be given to policymaking, health and social care service and health system development, the report recommends.

▪ **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that pregnancy rates continue to decline in the United States.**

The rate reached a 12-year low in 2009, when there were about 102 pregnancies for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, 12 percent below the 1990 rate of about 116 pregnancies per 1,000 women. Only the 1997 rate of 102 has been lower during the past 30 years, according to the report.

Experts said two factors are driving the downward trend: improved access to birth control and decisions by women to put off childbearing until later in life.

Those trends have caused the average age of pregnancy to shift upward.

Pregnancy rates for teenagers also have reached historic lows that extend across all racial and ethnic groups. Between 1990 and 2009, the pregnancy rate fell 51 percent for white and black teenagers, and 40 percent for Hispanic teenagers.

The teen birth rate dropped 39 percent between 1991 and 2009, and the teen abortion rate decreased by half during the same period.

Overall, pregnancy rates have continued to decline for women younger than 30. At the same time, pregnancy rates have steadily increased for women aged 30 to 44. The rate increased 16 percent between 1990 and 2009 for women aged 30 to 34, for example, and 35 percent for women aged 35 to 39. In addition to women having children later in life, they also are choosing to have fewer kids, which is driving down pregnancy rates.

Other findings from the CDC report include:

- The overall abortion rate in 2009 was the lowest recorded between 1976 and 2009. The rate -- 18.5 abortions per 1,000 women -- is one-third lower than in 1990, and reflects a nearly continuous decline since 1980.
- Pregnancy rates have declined about 10 percent each for married and unmarried women since 1990.
- The birth rate for married women is 72 percent higher than the rate for unmarried women.
- The abortion rate for unmarried women is nearly five times higher than the rate for married women.

## REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “VA Health Care: Improvements Needed in Processes Used to Address Providers’ Actions That Contribute to Adverse Events,” (GAO-14-55) on Dec. 3, 2013.** The report examined VA medical centers’ (VAMC) adherence to VHA’s protected peer review process, and the extent to which VHA monitors this process, and VAMCs’ adherence to VHA’s non-protected processes and the extent to which VHA monitors these processes. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/659378.pdf>
- **The Congressional Budget Office published “Federal Spending and Revenues Related to Health” on Dec. 3, 2013.** This report offers options for reducing federal spending or increasing tax revenues related to health care. <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44936>

## HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **Dec. 11, 2013**, to examine the Veterans Affairs (VA) claims system, focusing on a review of the Veterans Affairs' transformation progress.

## LEGISLATION

- **H.R.3633** (introduced Dec. 3, 2013): Protecting Health Care Providers from Increased Administrative Burdens Act was referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Sponsor: Representative Tim Walberg, [MI-7]

## MEETINGS

- 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 HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition will be held on **Feb. 27-29, 2014**, in Orlando, Fla. <http://www.himssconference.org/>
- The ACHE Congress on Healthcare Leadership will be held on **March 24-27, 2014**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.ache.org/congress/>
- The 11th Annual World Health Care Congress will be held on **April 7-9, 2014**, in National Harbor, Md. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR14000/>
- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 1, 2014**, 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](mailto:katetheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com).