



Healthcare Policy Roundup

April 24, 2018

Catch the Highlights!

- *State to expand Medicaid coverage for doulas in an effort to address high maternal mortality rates*
- *GOP Farm Bill proposes work requirements for SNAP beneficiaries*
- *Newly-announced NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force will identify better ways to respond to emotionally-distressed New Yorkers*

Questions? Comments?

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NYS to use doulas to address maternal mortality:

Earlier this week, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a series of initiatives aimed at addressing maternal mortality among black women throughout New York State. According to a recent [study](#) conducted by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), black women are four times more likely than white women to die during childbirth throughout the state. In New York City, black women are 12 times more likely than white women to experience maternal mortality.

Among several initiatives, the Cuomo Administration plans to expand Medicaid coverage for doulas – birth coaches that provide physical and emotional support to expecting mothers throughout pregnancy and childbirth. While multiple studies link doulas to positive birth outcomes, the cost of such professionals is frequently prohibitive. According to a 2014 [survey](#), black and low-income women are the most likely to want but not have access to doula services. State officials hope that increased access will have a positive effect on maternal mortality rates in these communities.

NYSDOH is expected to launch the program within the next two months. If successful, New York will join Minnesota and Oregon as the only states to provide Medicaid coverage for doula services. Other initiatives announced earlier this week include: the launch of a statewide Task Force on Maternal Mortality and Disparate Racial Outcomes, expansion of prenatal education programs and a comprehensive review of best practices around hemorrhaging – one of the leading causes of maternal mortality.

GOP Farm Bill targets SNAP recipients:

Earlier this month, House Republicans unveiled an initial draft for the 2018 Farm Bill -- multi-year, omnibus legislation that governs the bulk of agricultural and food programs across the United States. Among the proposed items is a controversial work mandate for individuals participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), often referred to as the food stamp program.

According to the proposal, able-bodied adults between ages 18 and 59 would be required to work or attend job training classes for 20 hours per week beginning in 2021. By 2026, that requisite would increase to 25 hours per week. Failure to adhere to these mandates would result in a 12-month suspension of SNAP benefits. Additional violations would raise the suspension period to three years.

Democrats have threatened to withhold support for the bill as long as this provision is included. According to Collin Peterson (D-MN), senior Democratic member of the House Agriculture Committee, these changes would “increase food insecurity and hardship.” SNAP provides food assistance to over 40 million individuals each year and accounts for 80 percent of the cost of the current Farm Bill. Of note, the current draft does not include the highly-contested proposal, floated by the Trump Administration, to replace EBT cards with nonperishable food boxes.



City announces Crisis Prevention & Response Task Force:

Weeks after New York City police officers shot and killed a Brooklyn man suffering from mental illness, the de Blasio Administration has announced the launch a citywide NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force. The 180-day initiative will focus on the prevention of mental health crises and identify ways to improve law enforcement responses to emotionally-distressed New Yorkers.

In the incident earlier this month, police responded to reports that a man was pointing a gun at bystanders on a Crown Heights sidewalk. When police arrived, reports say, the man pointed the gun at police who shot him to death. Police subsequently discovered that the dead man had been holding a pipe with a knob on it.

The Task Force will be comprised of a variety of stakeholders under the leadership of First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio. Among its primary goals, the Task Force will identify ways to increase early intervention programs for individuals at risk of mental health crises and improve coordination between health and public safety agencies. According to Police Commissioner James O’Neill: “Improving public safety and helping those suffering with mental health issues requires a holistic, multi-agency response. We can no longer tolerate a system that dispenses care and support through municipal siloes.”

Since 2015, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has trained over 8,000 officers in crisis intervention. The city has also paired public safety officers with mental health professionals as part of its Co-Response Team initiative. However, these teams have only responded to 2,500 of the 160,000 behavioral health-related calls received each year. The Health Department plans to launch its own crisis response teams in 2019. These teams will not include law enforcement.