



Healthcare Policy Roundup

July 31, 2018

Catch the Highlights!

- *State allocates \$5 million to hepatitis C elimination task force*
- *City implements smoke-free policy across all NYCHA developments*
- *Cuomo threatens legal action if proposed Title X changes are adopted*

Questions? Comments?

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State announces new hepatitis C initiative:

Last Friday, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a new initiative aimed at eliminating hepatitis C (HCV) throughout New York State. The program will appoint a hepatitis C task force and allocate \$5 million towards HCV prevention and treatment. The initiative is a culmination of recommendations presented at the Hepatitis C Elimination Summit in February and models itself after the state's End the Epidemic HIV/AIDS initiative.

Chronic hepatitis C is a blood-borne disease that, if left untreated, can lead to liver disease and cancer. It is primarily transmitted through intravenous drug use and sexual contact. While there is effective treatment, the cost of medication can be prohibitive for many New Yorkers. According to the New York State Department of Health, nearly 1,000 New Yorkers die each year from HCV complications. In 2016, the state counted over 14,000 new hepatitis C diagnoses – more than five times the number of new HIV infections.

Funding will be used to expand access to testing, treatment, and harm reduction services through a series of regulatory changes. These include modifying reimbursement structures to promote on-site testing and treatment, medication management, adherence counseling, and telemedicine services. The state will also extend HCV medication prior authorization periods and work with local non-profits to expand syringe exchange access throughout New York State.

Smoke-free policy goes into effect for NYCHA developments:

Beginning this week, residents living in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) units will be prohibited from smoking inside NYCHA apartments and within 25 feet of each building. The new regulation complies with a directive from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requiring over 3,100 public housing agencies throughout the country to implement smoke-free policies by July 30, 2018.



As part of the new rule, NYCHA staff and residents will be invited to attend an informational session about the smoking ban and learn about opportunities to access quit services. Smoking cessation resources will be made available through NYCHA's partnership with NYC Smoke-Free and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. According to a NYCHA spokesperson, the agency's goal is not to terminate tenancy, but provide residents with information and resources to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Public housing agencies were required to notify tenants about the policy change by January 2018 and provide families with a lease addendum in spring 2018. While some residents have come to terms with the new rule, others have already filed a lawsuit against the city claiming that the smoking ban infringes upon their rights. The policy will impact upwards of 400,000 residents throughout New York City.

Cuomo threatens legal action against Title X changes:

On Monday, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued a letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar threatening legal action against the Trump Administration should proposed changes to the Title X family planning program go into effect. The letter responds to federal attempts to limit access to abortion and other reproductive health services for Title X clients.

Echoing the argument of many reproductive health advocates, Cuomo contends that such changes would have a disproportionate effect upon low-income, uninsured, and underserved communities and "pose a grave danger for the health of women." The Governor also cites comments from the New York State Department of Health warning of social and economic repercussions of exacerbated health outcomes.

The letter is Cuomo's latest response to the Trump Administration's attempt to regulate reproductive health decisions. Earlier this month, the Governor directed the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to require health insurers to cover the cost of FDA-approved contraception and to ensure that commercial providers cover medically-necessary abortions without co-pays, coinsurance, or deductibles.

The federal government is accepting comments on the Title X changes through tonight. Community Healthcare Network will be submitting an organizational comment in opposition to the proposed regulation.