



# Healthcare Policy Roundup

October 30, 2018

## Catch the Highlights!

- *Trump signs \$8.5 billion package of bills aimed at combatting opioid epidemic*
- *Out-of-Network Consumer Protection Law shows some success three years later*
- *City Health Department to teach primary care providers about naloxone use*

## Questions? Comments?

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## White House signs sweeping opioid package:

President Trump signed sweeping legislation Wednesday aimed at “end[ing] the scourge of drug addiction in America.” The bipartisan package includes dozens of provisions related to the prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder. The \$8.5 billion package passed Congress earlier this year, despite concerns that additional funding is needed to effectively tackle the epidemic.

The legislation lifts restrictions on Medicaid coverage for residential treatment in larger health facilities, authorizes government-backed research on non-addictive alternatives to pain management, creates treatment diversion programs for individuals arrested on low-level drug offenses, and reauthorizes funding for the 21st Century Cures Act which allocates \$500 million annually to opioid prevention efforts. The bill also implements measures to curtail foreign opioid shipments by requiring the U.S. Postal Service to track and screen suspicious overseas packages.

Last year, over 72,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, with opioids killing more than 115 Americans each day. According to Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), the widespread nature of the epidemic paved the way for bipartisan support for the bill. Earlier this year, Congress approved an additional \$6 billion to address the epidemic. In April, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Congressman Elijah Cummings (D-MD) also proposed legislation that would allocate \$100 billion over the next ten years to support treatment and prevention efforts.

## State law increases transparency for out-of-network costs:

A panel headed by the New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS) this week highlighted the successes and challenges of the Out-of-Network Consumer Protection Law, which removes patient liability in cases where individuals are inadvertently treated by out-of-network providers in emergency settings or after attempting to use an in-network provider. The law was implemented in 2015 as part of an effort to protect consumers from surprise bills.



According to DFS Deputy Superintendent for Health Troy Oechsner, the law has led to mixed outcomes in the independent dispute-resolution process between providers and health plans. In emergency cases, health plans were more likely to win disputes related to surprise bills. Plastic surgeons were among the highest number of providers entering billing disputes in emergency settings, followed by emergency medicine physicians and orthopedic surgeons. Conversely, providers rendering services in non-emergency settings were more likely to win billing disputes, with neurosurgeons and anesthesiologists representing the highest number of cases.

While the law has ultimately led to better resolution of surprise bill complaints, it does not address the complexity of information that consumers must navigate when understanding coverage for various product lines. According to Elizabeth Benjamin of the Community Service Society of New York, nearly 35% of consumer complaints are related to inaccurate information from either health plans or providers about in-network coverage.

## City Health Department to educate providers on naloxone:

Representatives from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) will visit nearly 800 primary care providers between October and December to encourage distribution of naloxone to at-risk patients and families, according to DOHMH. The campaign is a part of a larger, city-backed effort to save up to 400 lives by 2022.

As part of the campaign, primary care providers will learn to identify patients at risk of opioid overdose, educate patients about overdose risk and naloxone use, and prescribe or refer patients to naloxone prescribing locations. Providers will also be directed to promote DOHMH’s overdose prevention [mobile app](#) and inform patients about the New York State Naloxone Co-Payment Assistance Program which covers up to \$40 in copayments for naloxone medication.

The initiative will target neighborhoods with high rates of opioid overdose, including: East New York, East Harlem, the Rockaways, Hunts Point-Mott Haven, and Stapleton-St. George on Staten Island. Previous efforts have included borough-specific campaigns encouraging providers to prescribe opioids more judiciously. Post evaluation reports showed that these campaigns reached more than 3,000 prescribers between 2013 and 2017 and effectively increased provider knowledge around opioid prescription.