

Rural Reporter

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Top Stories

Medicare Eases Up On Readmissions Penalties

At the direction of Congress, Medicare will begin easing up on its annual readmissions penalties for hundreds of hospitals serving large populations of low-income patients.

Starting next month, Medicare will take into account a long-standing complaint from some hospitals: that their patients are more likely to suffer complications after leaving the hospital through no fault of the institution, but rather because they cannot afford medications or don't have regular care to monitor their recovery.



Photo: rawpixel on Unsplash

NPR and Kaiser Health News have the story

Wisconsin Ranked Fourth In National Health Plan Rankings



NCOA Health Insurance Plan Ratings 2018-2019 - Summary Report (Private)
 Search for a health insurance plan by state, plan name or plan type (private, Medicaid, Medicare). Click a plan name for a detailed analysis.
 In 2018, NCOA rated more than 1,200 health insurance plans based on clinical quality, member satisfaction and NCOA Accreditation Survey results. This way of rating plans emphasizes care outcomes (the results of care people receive) and what patients say about their care.
 Note: The overall rating score is the weighted average of all measures, not an average of the three categories (Consumer Satisfaction, Prevention, Treatment). For more information about the ratings, including how they are calculated, visit our 2018 ratings page.

Rating	Plan Name	State	Type	NCOA Accreditation	Consumer Satisfaction	Prevention	Treatment
5.0	Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin	WI	HMO	Yes	5.0	4.5	4.5
4.5	Dean Health Plan, Inc.	WI	HMO	Yes	4.5	4.5	4.5
4.5	HealthPartners Administrators Inc.	IA, MN, WI	HMO/POS/PRO	Yes	5.0	4.5	4.0
4.5	HealthPartners, Inc.	MN, WI	HMO/POS/PRO	Yes	5.0	4.5	4.0
4.5	Medical Associates Clinic Health Plan of Wisconsin dba Medical Associates Health Plan Special Project Accreditation	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	4.5	5.0	4.5
4.5	Unity Health Plans Insurance Corporation	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	5.0	4.5	4.0
4.5	Compass Health Services Insurance Corporation dba Andrew Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Wisconsin	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.5	Humana Insurance Company (Wisconsin)	WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.5	Humana Wisconsin Health Organization Insurance Corporation (Wisconsin)	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.5	Medica Health Plans of Wisconsin (MHPW)	MN, WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.0	Medica Insurance Company (MIC)	MN, SD, WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.0	Medica Self-Insured (MSI)	MN, SD, WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.0	Allegiance HMO, Inc dba MercyCare Health Plans	WI	HMO	Yes	5.0	5.0	4.0
4.0	Norwalk Health Plan	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	5.0	4.5	5.0
4.0	Physicians Plus Insurance Corporation	WI	HMO/POS	No	5.0	4.5	4.5
4.0	Security Health Plan of Wisconsin, Inc	WI	HMO/POS/PRO	Yes	5.0	4.5	4.0
4.0	United HealthCare Services, Inc. (Wisconsin)	WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.0	UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company (Wisconsin)	WI	PPO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0
4.0	UnitedHealthcare of Wisconsin, Inc.	WI	HMO/POS	Yes	5.0	4.5	5.0
3.5	Aetna Life Insurance Company (Wisconsin)	WI	PPO/PRO	Yes	5.0	5.0	5.0

Wisconsin was fourth in a ranking of the nation's health plans that was released last week by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, an independent nonprofit organization.

Several commercial plans - the Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin, Dean Health Plan, HealthPartners, Medical Associates, and Unity - received high marks. The rankings looked at the performance of the insurance plans across three metrics: consumer satisfaction, prevention, and

treatment.

See how all the plans measure up

Congress Finalizes Opioids Bill

Congress has finalized a wide-ranging package intended to address the opioid epidemic.

One provision in the bill will repeal a rule that blocks states from spending federal Medicaid funds on residential addiction treatment at centers with more than sixteen beds.

Another provision allows nurse practitioners and physician assistants to prescribe buprenorphine, a form of medication-assisted treatment that requires a waiver and extra training.



Shortages of buprenorphine are especially acute in rural areas.

One provision that *didn't* make it into the package? A change to technical language in Medicare Part D that would have benefited pharmaceutical companies. And, lawmakers failed to pass a proposed roll-back of additional privacy rules that shroud patient addiction treatment records.

The New York Times has the story

More News

- Wisconsin will receive **over \$11 million in federal funding to improve bus systems and vehicles across the state**. The largest chunk of the funding, \$5 million, will go to the state Department of Transportation to purchase new buses for **rural** transit providers. Appleton, Janesville, and the Menominee Indian Tribe will receive the rest of the funding for bus replacement projects. (Source: Wisconsin State Journal)
- Direct primary care is a **healthcare model in which patients pay membership fees to doctors rather than insurance companies**. Other states have passed legislation or considered the model, but in Wisconsin, no state law regulating direct primary care exists. (Source: WisContext)
- A Senate subcommittee **heard testimony about healthcare in rural America** this week, and the session **highlighted all kinds of pressing issues in rural healthcare** - from hospital closures and long travel distances necessary to receive care, to difficulties defining "rural" for particular federal funding, to the shortage of primary care physicians in rural areas. (Source: CSPAN; MedPage Today)
- A **new report tracks healthcare quality** across more than 300 measures. Wisconsin was in the highest quartile for overall quality of care, but it also ranked as one of the states with the most racial and ethnic disparities in care. (Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

Stay Tuned for Our EMS Listening Tour



We'll be traveling across the state in October and November to listen to the concerns of rural EMS. We're kicking it off in Spooner, Woodruff, Oconto Falls, and Boscobel. These sessions are designed for rural EMS to describe their situation, while legislators, municipality/county leaders, and state leadership listen. We hope that in having these sessions, we can hear solutions from you on ways to improve the burden on rural emergency management while maintaining and expanding patient outcomes.

Watch our [highlighted events page](#) for more details.

Grants & Funding Opportunities

- The **Healthy Tomorrows Partnership for Children Program** will support community-based child health projects that improve the health status of mothers, infants, children, and adolescents in rural and other underserved communities by increasing their access to health services. (Deadline: October 1st)
- Public entities or nonprofit organizations can **apply for grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** to study the implementation and impact of mechanisms to align delivery and financing systems supporting a Culture of Health. Studies should include a focus on health equity. (Deadline: October 10th)
- The National Institutes of Health is soliciting **grant applications for projects that will bring useful, usable health information** to health disparity populations and their health care providers. Institutions and organizations in rural and socially disadvantaged areas are encouraged to apply. (Deadline: October 22nd)
- The **federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant** provides direct financial assistance to eligible fire departments and nonaffiliated Emergency Medical Services agencies. The funds may be used for vehicles, training, and equipment. (Deadline: October 26th)
- Farmers in many Wisconsin counties are eligible to enroll for **a chance to direct \$2,500 awards to local nonprofit organizations and civic groups** that are important to them and their communities, including schools and fire departments. (Deadline: November 1st)
- Accredited institutions of higher education or behavioral health professional training programs can **apply for funding to enhance training focused on opioid use disorder for students** preparing to become behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. (Deadline: November 6th)

Events

- This year's **Wisconsin Health Insurance Enrollment Conference** will provide information for navigators and others who assist consumers in signing up for health insurance. The conference will be held at the Heidel House Resort in Green Lake. (Tuesday, October 2nd - Wednesday, October 2nd)
- A full-day **dementia care workshop designed for nursing home staff** will examine how words, language, and attitudes shape perceptions around dementia.

The workshop will be held in Appleton. (Thursday, October 4th)

- A webinar for critical access hospitals will cover post-acute transitional care for utilizing the swing bed program. By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to understand the key steps to initiate, implement and track progress in developing care. [Register here](#). (Tuesday, October 9th)
- A **summit from the Wisconsin Council on Medical Education and Workforce** will bring together policymakers, implementers, and providers to address the state's healthcare workforce needs today and in the future. Of particular note are the discussions on incentive programs and retention strategies for rural providers. The conference will be held at the Glacier Canyon Lodge in the Wisconsin Dells. (Friday, November 2nd)
- The **MetaStar Health Care Quality Symposium** will feature different tracks on effective communication between patients and providers, the impact of alcohol on patient care, the Quality Payment Program, and the state of palliative care in Wisconsin. The symposium will be held at the Glacier Canyon Conference Center in the Wisconsin Dells. (Wednesday, November 14th)



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Wisconsin Office of Rural Health