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Gov. Pritzker Announces BEACON Care Portal for Youth

On Monday, Gov. Pritzker, the Illinois Dept. of Human Services and Google Public Sector announced the creation of BEACON (Behavioral Health Care and Ongoing Navigation): A Service Access Portal for Illinois Youth. Currently being piloted by hospitals and other stakeholders, the permanent online portal will provide a user-friendly experience for Illinois families to access behavioral and mental health resources for children. The portal, estimated for initial public release in the summer of 2024, will be HIPAA compliant and powered by Google Cloud's secure, scalable, and advanced artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing technology.

Mandated by [Public Act 103-546](#), the permanent portal is based on a current pilot portal used by stakeholders, like families and guardians of children seeking to secure service access, as well as hospital staff, to secure child placement from an emergency department or inpatient psychiatric unit. Currently, 45% of the youth entered into the pilot portal are in hospital settings seeking additional access across the care continuum. Based on hospital feedback on the pilot portal, IHA advocated to expand the portal statewide and supported the state legislation.

During yesterday's press conference, the Pritzker administration announced a January 2024 [Progress Report](#) update on the Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative. The initiative was launched in February 2022 and led to creation of the portal. For more information on IHA's partnership with the administration on this issue and hospital boarding resources, see the Jan. 18 [IHA memo](#).

[Contact us](#) with questions.

MACPAC Recommends Changes to Improve Medicaid Oversight

The Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) recently recommended seven changes to Medicaid managed care policy intended to improve oversight of Medicaid managed care organization (MCO) denials and identify potential solutions to current challenges related to the appeals process and monitoring, oversight, and transparency of managed care denials and appeals. Recommendations include:

- Requiring states establish an independent, external medical review process that can be accessed by the beneficiary;
- Requiring the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issue guidance to improve content and clarity of denial notices and guidance to better support beneficiaries in navigating the appeals process;
- Requiring MCOs to provide beneficiaries with the option of receiving an electronic denial notice, in addition to the mailed notice;
- Requiring CMS to extend the timeline for requesting continuation of benefits, and adopt language and tools to make the information more accessible and prominent;
- Requiring states collect and report data on denials, beneficiary use of continuation of benefits, and appeals outcomes;

- Requiring states conduct audits of managed care denials; and
- Posting all state Managed Care Program Annual Reports to the CMS website to improve transparency of denials and appeals information.

[Click here](#) to view an overview of MACPAC's recommendations.

Perinatal OUD ECHO Survey: Fellowship Application

Rush University Medical Center is now accepting team applications for the third cohort of the Perinatal Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) ECHO® Program, a free program designed to train Illinois providers, including physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse midwives, social workers, peer recovery coaches, medical assistants and doulas, in the assessment and treatment of OUD in their clinical settings for pregnant individuals.

The training will provide clinical guidance and technical support around clinical workflows, policies, and protocols to ensure compliance with clinical standards and evidence-based practice. Each participant will receive a certificate, approximately 12 hours of continuing education credits and training reimbursement upon full completion. The application deadline is March 8. [Click here](#) for additional information, including application details, program information and related incentives.

HC3 Sector Alert: Unauthorized Threat Access to HPH Sector

Security researchers are warning that Healthcare and Public Health (HPH) organizations that use the remote access tool ScreenConnect could be adversely affected or targeted by threat actors. The impact of potential unauthorized access on both federal and private industry victims, many of which rely on this tool, would be a concerning development for the healthcare sector. The alert provides a technical overview of issues concerning the remote access tool, indicators of compromise, and recommendations for mitigations to detect and protect against future cyberattacks. [Click here](#) to review the Health Sector Cybersecurity Coordination Center (HC3) Sector Alert for more details.

COVID-19 Information

The Illinois Dept. of Public Health (IDPH) has launched a weekly [Infectious Respiratory Disease Surveillance Dashboard](#) that will be updated weekly on Friday. This report provides the public with the latest data on hospital visits, seasonal trends, lab test positivity and demographic data.

[Click here](#) to visit the IDPH COVID-19 resources webpage. IDPH will continue to report the weekly number of people with COVID-19 admitted to hospitals from emergency departments, deaths and vaccinations, with COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus information also reported through the dashboard of the [Illinois Wastewater Surveillance System](#).

Briefly Noted

Approximately 90% of physicians report experiencing some type of depression, according to Medscape's 2024 "[Physician Burnout and Depression Report](#)." At 63%, emergency medicine topped the list of specialists who reported feeling burned out or burned out and depressed, followed by obstetricians and oncologists (53%), and pediatricians and family physicians (51%). The top three factors that contributed to burnout were bureaucratic tasks (62%), too many hours at work (41%), and lack of respect from administrators/employers, colleagues or staff (40%).

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Illinois Health and Hospital Association