



News briefs

White House Launches New Initiative to Reduce Medical Debt Burden

The Vice President announced several new actions from across the federal government aimed at learning more about the scope of medical debt practices, reducing the role that medical debt plays in accessing credit, forgiving low-income veterans' medical debt, and improving consumer education around medical billing and financial assistance. As part of this initiative, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will ask more than 2,000 health care providers for data on their medical bill collection practices, lawsuits against patients, financial assistance, financial product offerings and third-party contracting or debt buying practices. The department will use this data to inform grant making decisions and develop policy recommendations. The department plans to make public topline data, as well as share potential violations with the relevant enforcement agencies.

Separately, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) will continue to investigate and hold accountable credit reporting companies and debt collectors that violate patients' and families' rights. As part of this work, the CFPB published in January a bulletin on preventing unlawful medical debt collection and credit reporting.

The Administration will be releasing new guidance to all federal agencies on eliminating or reducing the impact of medical debt as a factor for underwriting in federal credit programs, whenever possible and consistent with current law. Some agencies have already begun this work, including the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), the Small Business Administration and the Federal Housing Finance Agency.

The CFPB will release new consumer education tools aimed at helping consumers navigate the medical billing process, as well as understand and access financial assistance that they may qualify for. The tools will be available on the CFPB website.

The American Hospital Association last year asked hospitals and health systems to affirm their commitment to AHA's voluntary patient billing guidelines. Many hospitals and health systems have already affirmed their commitment to this important effort. If your organization has not done so yet, please join your colleagues from across the nation affirming your organization's commitment to adopting the AHA Patient Billing Guidelines. You can access more information about the affirmation and resources to assist you with this effort aha.org

SAVE THE DATES

**National Hospital Week
May 8-14, 2022**

**WHA Trustee Board Education
May 19, 2022
7:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.
Riverton, Wyoming**

**WHA Annual Meeting
September 7-8, 2022
Marian H. Rochelle Gateway Center/
University of Wyoming
Conference Center
Laramie, Wyoming**



**2022 PAC
Contributions**

**Barry Burkart
Tim Thornell
Eric Boley**



Riverton Medical District Takes Major Step Toward New Hospital

The Riverton Medical District is pleased to announce they have taken a major step toward the goal of building a new hospital. The District has been awarded a USDA Rural Development loan of \$37 million dollars for the project. This is the largest award it has ever provided in Wyoming. This welcome news is important for the community leaders' plans to move forward and allow the Riverton Medical District team to take the next steps for creating a new locally owned and governed health care facility.

The low-interest USDA Community Facilities loan announcement adds to the recent positive news of the Riverton Medical District signing a Letter of Intent with Billings Clinic to be the clinical and management partner for the new health care facility. Billings Clinic is a regional health care leader with an affiliation network featuring relationships with 17 health care facilities across Montana and Wyoming, including Basin, Lovell and Powell; and a clinic in Cody.



WHRN Announces New Executive Director

Caroline Hickerson is delighted to be joining the Wyoming Health Resources Network (WHRN) as the new Executive Director. As a lifelong Wyomingite, Caroline is committed to helping grow and improve health care opportunities throughout the state. She grew up in Gillette and now resides in Cheyenne with her husband and two children. Caroline completed both her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Wyoming and has years of organizational leadership experience that she is excited to apply in her new position. In her free time Caroline enjoys spending time outside enjoying Wyoming's beautiful public lands as well as cheering on the Pokes whenever possible.

The Wyoming Health Resources Network (WHRN) is a non-profit 501c3 organization committed to improving health in the state of Wyoming. Our primary mission is to help recruit and retain exceptional medical professionals across the state and by doing so increase access to exceptional healthcare and promote a healthier Wyoming.



Federal Funding Bill Addresses Hospitals' 340B Eligibility Concerns

Legislation to fund the federal government through the remainder of FY22 includes temporary relief on hospitals' eligibility criteria for the 340B Drug Pricing Program.

Some hospitals have been dropped from the program because of payer-mix changes triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The falloff in the share of Medicaid inpatient days relative to total inpatient days at those hospitals has taken Disproportionate Share Hospital patient percentages below the threshold needed to qualify for 340B.

The legislation, which was passed by Congress on March 10, ensures that hospitals can stay in the program through the end of this year if they otherwise would lose eligibility based on patient data included in Medicare cost reports spanning 2020 through 2022. To obtain the exemption, hospitals must attest that the loss of eligibility stemmed from the clinical and operational impact of COVID-19.