

# Three Minute Read™

## Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

Overdose deaths down; US ranks last among high-income countries – again!

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**From the Editor:** This issue's article summaries include outbreak updates, the sorry state of American healthcare, and more. Click on the headline for the full article. If you enjoy TMR, please upgrade to a paid subscription [here](#).



[COVID variant XEC sees rapid global growth: What to know about the new strain](#), by Anthony Robeldo, USA Today, 9/16/24

**TMR Topline** – As [flu season](#) nears, yet another Covid variant, XEC, has emerged and is spreading rapidly across multiple countries. The Scripps [Outbreak.info](#) page reported 95 XEC cases across 12 US states and 15 different countries. "At this juncture, the XEC variant appears to be the [most likely one to get legs next](#)," Scripps Research Director Eric Topol wrote on X. The CDC has not confirmed whether there are any unique symptoms from the XEC variant. Covid-19 symptoms can appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea. The CDC recommends that [everyone](#) ages 6 months and older, with some exceptions, receive an updated 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine to protect against the virus.



[CDC says close contact of Missouri bird flu patient showed symptoms](#), by Berkeley Lovelace, Jr., NBC News, 9/12/24

**TMR Topline** – The CDC has yet to identify "a clear source" of [infection in a Missouri patient](#) who tested

positive for the bird flu virus. The patient, who was hospitalized in August, had no known contact with poultry or dairy cows. A close contact within the patient's household "was also ill at the same time, was not tested, and has since recovered," the CDC wrote in its FluView. Missouri state health officials are still investigating the case. The CDC maintains that the risk to the general population remains low.



[Once-weekly insulin from Eli Lilly appears effective as daily injections](#), by Nancy Lapid, Reuters, 9/11/24

**TMR Topline** – Eli Lilly's experimental insulin that is injected just once a week appears as effective as daily insulin injections for maintaining blood sugar levels in patients with type 1 or type 2 diabetes in two late-stage trials. The researchers compared blood sugar management for more than a year for weekly injections of the new weekly insulin (efsitora) compared with daily insulin injections. One trial involved 623 participants with type 1 diabetes, while the other included 928 patients with type 2. In both trials, hemoglobin A1c levels decreased when compared with the previous three months. Determining the right dose of efsitora was more difficult in type 1 patients. These patients experienced more episodes of hypoglycemia in the first 12 weeks of treatment, according to a report of the trial in The Lancet. "More work is needed to evaluate efsitora dose initiation and optimization" to maintain efficacy while mitigating the risk of hypoglycemia in people with type 1 diabetes," study leader Dr. Richard Bergenstal of the HealthPartners Institute in Minneapolis said.



[U.S. overdose deaths plummet, saving thousands of lives](#), by Brian Mann, NPR, 9/18/24

**TMR Topline** – Public health data is showing a welcome drop in US drug overdose deaths. The CDC's national surveys show an unprecedented [decline in drug deaths of roughly 10.6%](#).

Most experts agree that the data doesn't yet provide clear answers, but, some pointed to rapid improvements in the availability and affordability of medical treatments for fentanyl addiction. Others pointed to the end of the Covid pandemic. The Biden administration prioritized disrupting the supply of illicit fentanyl and other synthetic drugs and, last year, made naloxone available over-the-counter. Many people using fentanyl now carry naloxone.



### [Drug Price Negotiations: Learnings from the Harkness Fellowship](#), by Molly Fitzgerald,

The Commonwealth Fund, 9/16/24

**TMR Topline** – Harkness Fellow [Iselin Dahlen Syversen](#) completed a

comparative analysis of how eight nations (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, and the UK) negotiate prescription drug prices with manufacturers. All conduct Health Technology Assessments (HTAs) before the drug enters the market that include clinical efficacy, safety, budgetary impact, and cost-effectiveness of new drugs relative to currently available treatment options. HTAs are a key step in tying negotiated prices more closely to a drug's efficacy and clinical value. CMS bases its [initial offer](#) on estimates of the net clinical benefits of the drug compared to its therapeutic alternatives. Price negotiations start around the time that a drug is ready to enter the market, ensuring affordable access to novel medicines from the beginning. Medicare's drug price negotiation process can begin only 7-11 years after the FDA's approval or licensure, depending on the type of drug. Other countries ensure better health outcomes for beneficiaries while managing health care costs more effectively.



### [Hill GOP sets sights on scrapping drug price talks](#), by Peter Sullivan, AXIOS, 9/17/24

**TMR Topline** – High-ranking Republicans want to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act's Medicare drug price

negotiations next year if they prevail in the elections. They argue that the IRA provision is not a real "negotiation" because companies that opt out would be hit with a steep tax for nonparticipation, and the process amounts to price setting. They also say it harms innovation that leads to new cures. The Congressional Budget Office

found that the negotiation provisions would save about \$100 billion over 10 years.



### [U.S. ranks last in health care compared with nine other high-income countries, report finds](#), by

Berkeley Lovelace, Jr., NBC News, 9/19/24

**TMR Topline** – According to a [report by The Commonwealth Fund](#), the US health system is failing. The US ranks as the worst performer among 10 developed nations (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK) in critical areas of health care. Each country was graded on five categories: access to care, care process, administrative efficiency, equity and health outcomes. The researchers said the US stood out for its "exceptionally weak" performance. People in the US die the youngest and experience the most avoidable deaths, even though the country spends nearly twice as much — about 18% of GDP — on health care than any other nation ranked. The US ranked last or near last on all but care process, in which it ranked second behind New Zealand. Care process measures things like preventive services, including mammograms and flu vaccinations, and engagement with patients.

Health care is [among the top priorities for voters](#) in the November presidential election. VP Kamala Harris has pitched building on the Affordable Care Act. Former President Donald Trump [has given little detail](#) about his health care vision; his running mate, JD Vance, has suggested [deregulation](#). The report also listed solutions to the country's health care problems, including lowering the cost of care and expanding access to coverage.

**TMR's Take:** The world's wealthiest country has consistently ranked as the worst performer among high-income nations since the Commonwealth Fund started its reporting in 2004. Yet, Republicans want to repeal the IRA's drug price negotiations and deregulate the health insurance marketplace. Shades of 2003, when the Medicare Modernization Act handed Big Pharma and health insurers a gold mine. Enacted in 2010, the Affordable Care Act now has nearly [50 million enrollees](#) and the number of uninsured is at its [lowest level](#) this century. If providing access to affordable healthcare for all Americans is your #1 issue, the choice is clear – let's not go back!