



STAT News

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FEDERAL UPDATE: Gov't Re-opens, Avoids Default; Hospitals Remain Wary of More Cuts Tied to Budget Talks

The agreement reached on Wednesday, October 16, 2013 to re-open the federal government and avoid debt default carries through only to the early part of 2014 and, at that time, brings with it the threat of another standoff and the real possibility of more harmful Medicare and Medicaid cuts to hospitals. Wednesday's agreement directs Congressional House-Senate negotiators to deliver a budget plan by December 13, 2013 that tackles the nation's debt and deficit concerns. Conferees could look to cut spending for such programs as Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, while seeking higher tax revenues by closing loopholes for corporations and wealthy individuals.

The new federal government funding deadline is January 15, 2014. Congress must act by then and pass another continuing resolution in order to avoid another shutdown. The next deadline for raising the debt ceiling limit is February 7, 2014. During this time, the White House will be working on its version of the upcoming federal fiscal year budget.

Meanwhile, another round of automatic sequestration cuts to domestic programs occurs in January 2014. These cuts are the result of the failure of a bi-partisan "super committee" to develop a debt/deficit reduction plan by November 2011. As a result, sequester cuts went into effect earlier this year. Hospitals in the Suburban Hospital Alliance regions will endure \$629 million (2013 – 2021) in Medicare cuts due to this sequester.

STATE UPDATE: Marketplace Doing Robust Business

Nearly three weeks into open enrollment on the New York State of Health insurance marketplace, the New York State Department of Health says hundreds of New Yorkers have enrolled in one of the insurance plans offered by the marketplace and thousands have sought information. The marketplace's customer service line – 1-855-355-5777 – and its online portal – www.nystateofhealth.ny.us – were swamped at the start of the enrollment period and continue to see heavy traffic. In-person navigators report similar activity at enrollment sites.

The marketplace is the online exchange legislated by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Individuals and small businesses (fewer than 50 employees) can shop for affordable health insurance through the marketplace. On Long Island, the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council, one of the local hospital associations that is part of the Suburban Hospital Alliance of New York State, LLC, is one of three state-appointed navigator agencies serving the Long Island region. The Hudson Valley region is serviced by the Community Service Society of New York, Maternal Infant Services Network of Orange, Sullivan, and Ulster counties and the Westchester County and Rockland County Departments of Health. The marketplace offers four metal tiers – bronze, silver, gold, platinum – to choose from with different co-pays, deductibles, out-of-pocket limits, and covered services. Based on income and family size, applicants may be eligible for premium assistance and/or further cost sharing assistance. Small businesses may be eligible for tax credits. Enrollment continues through March 31, 2014, but for insurance that is effective January 1, 2014 applicants must apply by December 15, 2013 and by February 15, 2014 to avoid a penalty.

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