



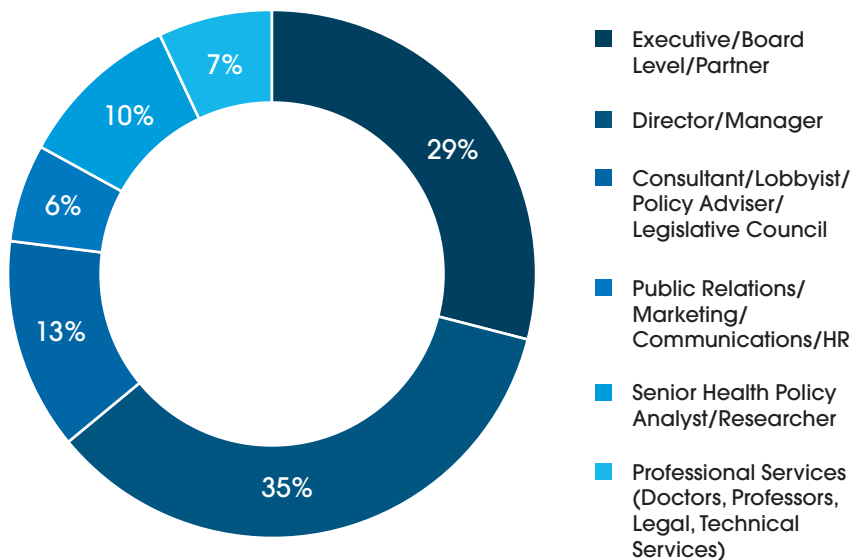
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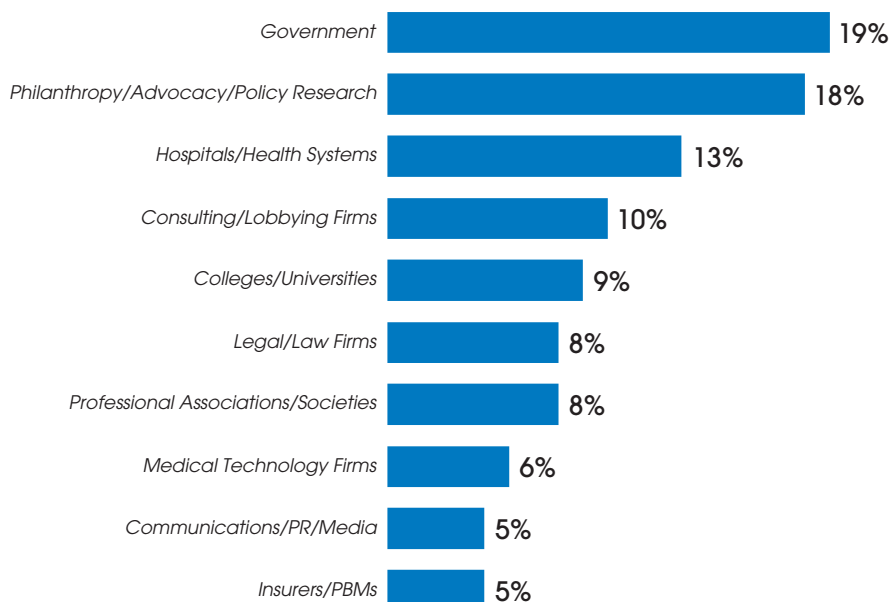
A free e-mail from *American Health Line*, *First Look* gives busy professionals a quick, easy-to-read overview of the most important health care news and events of the day.

- We have more than 2,400 subscribers, including St. Francis Health System, New York University School of Medicine, and the National Institutes of Health
- We publish First Look Monday through Friday by 8:30 a.m. ET, except on federal holidays. Please ask about other blackout days.

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Since 1992, executives and leaders in the health care industry have turned to *American Health Line* for nonpartisan health care news and analysis. Our expert writers and editors search hundreds of sources and pull together the most important information to provide readers with a comprehensive view of the day's health care news. *American Health Line* arrives in readers' e-mail inboxes by 11:30 a.m. ET, and we update our blog and Twitter feed throughout the day to keep readers informed about important happenings and point them to interesting reads. Our subscribers include the Executive Office of the President, CMS, John Hopkins University, Mayo Clinic, AARP, and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

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FIRST LOOK

Today's News

SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME

HHS announced yesterday that the average monthly premium for Medicare's prescription drug program is not expected to increase in 2012. The agency estimated the average premium next year will be about \$30 a month, close to the \$30.76 monthly premiums this year. Officials said increasing use of generics and competition between private insurers within the program have helped stabilize premiums. The agency also expects a decrease in certain costs as more top-selling brand-name drugs' patents expire.

USING THE DEAL

Senate Republicans are investigating how the 12-member deficit-reduction committee created by the newly enacted debt deal can cut costs under the federal health reform law. Under the deal, the bipartisan, bicameral committee must develop a package of \$1.5 trillion in additional federal spending cuts by end-November this year. Senate Republican leadership aides already have asked the Congressional Budget Office to identify the overhaul's provisions that could be targeted. One GOP senator said aides have identified at least 15 such provisions.

Around the Nation

- The Army is looking to hire 130 substance use disorder counselors by Oct. 1, to help soldiers who could potentially continue their military service.
- The current issue of *Health Affairs* focuses on the issue of substance use disorders, including an article that examines the upcoming expansion and changes to treatment under the federal health reform law.
- A perspective piece in the *New England Journal of Medicine* examines the constitutional hurdles states face in prohibiting pharmacies from sharing prescription drug information.

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Also in Today's *AHL*

NOT IN OUR STATE

Michigan Reps. Dave Camp (R) and Fred Upton (R) yesterday sent a letter to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius urging the administration to exempt their home state from the medical-loss ratio provision in the federal health reform law.

WORKED FOR ME

After undergoing a stem cell treatment one month ago, Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) has begun attempting to bring the procedure to his own state.

Now on the Blog

THE FRIDAY RUNDOWN: MONEY ON THE MIND

Everyone has money on his or her mind. And we're not just talking about the ongoing debate over the fiscal year 2012 budget and debt limit. Maybe it's because of the discussion on federal spending, but a number of reports were released this week that looked at the state of health spending in the U.S. Here's what you need to know from the past week in health policy news.

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The Thermometer: The Hottest Health Policy Stories



- HOTTEST:** Now that the debt deal is done, it's the lobbyists' turn
- HOTTER:** Will or won't the health reform law cause employers to drop coverage?
- HOT:** States begin to make high-risk insurance coverage more affordable

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- Keeps them abreast of federal and regulatory developments
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FIRST LOOK

Today's News

WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Standard & Poor's decision on Friday to downgrade the U.S. credit rating for the first time in history should provide a new congressional debt panel with extra incentive to cut spending in entitlement programs, such as Medicare. The panel will be authorized to cut federal budget deficits by at least \$1.5 trillion, but S&P said in its [report](#) that it hopes to see total deficit reductions of at least \$4 trillion. S&P also noted that cutting entitlement programs is "key to long-term fiscal sustainability," adding that the debt deal "envisions only minor policy changes on Medicare."

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Congressional leaders have begun selecting the 12 members of the bipartisan, bicameral panel that will be required to develop a package of additional spending cuts under the recent debt deal. The House and Senate's four top leaders must name three candidates to the panel by Aug. 16. The panel is expected to propose more spending cuts in key federal entitlement programs, which could include changes to Medicare such as restructuring program benefits, raising eligibility age or addressing fraud and abuse.

Around the Nation

- The Army is [looking to hire](#) 130 substance use disorder counselors by October 1, to help soldiers who could potentially continue their military service.
- The temperature at which lunches brought from home by most preschoolers are stored make the food unsafe, according to a [study](#) published in the *Journal Pediatrics*.
- More non-psychiatric physicians are prescribing antidepressants for their patients, according to a [study](#) in the August issue of *Health Affairs*.

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Also in Today's AHL

DOES NOT COMPUTE

Massachusetts' health reform law has increased the number of state residents with coverage, but has not decreased the number of individuals who seek care at safety-net facilities, according to a new *JAMA* study.

TOO SMALL TO MATTER

HHS has rejected Guam's request for a waiver from the medical-loss ratio rule in the federal health reform law, noting that the U.S. territory's market is so small that it would not be penalized if it failed to meet rule's requirements.

Now on the Blog

A DEAL, SOME NUMBERS AND SOME HOPE

A debt deal that may or may not cut Medicare and Medicaid spending was signed last week; another survey was released on how employers will react to the federal health reform law; and states have started to lower premiums for the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan created by the overhaul. Here's a recap of the last week in health policy news. [More >>](#)

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The Thermometer: The Hottest Health Policy Stories



- HOTTEST:** Pressure on deficit panel increases; will entitlements be targeted?
- HOTTER:** What exactly is patient satisfaction, and how can it be measured?
- HOT:** States' MLR waiver requests trickle in

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