

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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From the Editor: TMR begins its fourth year of publishing with big news from Big Pharma and a major insurer, pandemic updates and union activity among physicians. Click on the headline to read the full article.



[Eli Lilly Slashes Insulin Prices Up To 70% And Caps Out-Of-Pocket Costs At \\$35](#), by Alex Knapp,

Forbes, 3/1/23

TMR Topline – Eli Lilly is reducing prices of its most commonly prescribed insulin products 70% and capping out-of-pocket costs for its insulin products to \$35 per month for those with commercial insurance. Lilly was the first company to mass-produce human insulin for the treatment of diabetes in the 1920s and makes several different insulin products including Humalog and Rezvoglar, a biosimilar to Sanofi's Lantus. The American Diabetes Association issued a statement praising Lilly's price cuts and encouraged other insulin manufacturers to do the same.

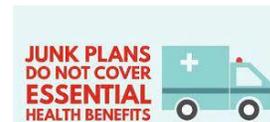


[Eli Lilly Slashed Insulin Prices. This Starts a Race to the Bottom.](#)
by Bram Sable-Smith and Samantha Young, Kaiser Health News, 3/2/23

TMR Topline – Lilly's announcement raised questions about what will happen to other efforts to provide low-cost insulin. Utah-based nonprofit Civica plans to begin selling biosimilar insulin for roughly \$30 per vial by 2024. California is poised to launch an ambitious program to manufacture its [own brand of the hormone](#), as well as generics of other high-priced prescription drugs. And Mark Cuban's Cost Plus Drug

Co., [plans to sell low-cost insulin](#). Drug-pricing experts predict the move won't undercut those efforts. People with diabetes, especially those with Type 1 who need the drug to survive, will benefit. Civica's plan remains unchanged following the news and California Governor Gavin Newsome confirmed the state's [intent](#). Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Sen. Bernie Sanders sent letters to the two other major insulin makers, [Sanofi](#) and [Novo Nordisk](#), calling on them to follow suit.

TMR's Take: After decades of price gouging diabetic Americans, there's no altruism in the Eli Lilly move. Rather, it's a response to market pressures resulting from the \$35/month cap for Medicare beneficiaries, California's move to manufacture its own insulin, nonprofit Civica's market entry and billionaire entrepreneur Mark Cuban's plan to sell low-cost insulin. Modern Healthcare Editor Emeritus Merrill Goozner likened Lilly's move as straight out of John D. Rockefeller's [Standard Oil Trust](#) playbook that eliminated his competitors, resulted in an illegal monopoly that a 1911 US Supreme Court ruling dissolved.



[Senators continue fight against 'junk' health plans](#),
by Jakob Emerson, Becker's Hospital Review, 2/22/23

TMR Topline – With Medicaid redeterminations due to begin April 1, lawmakers are calling on President Biden to take action against "junk" short-term health plans. Junk plans are short-term plans that provide limited coverage. They don't have to cover preexisting conditions or the ACA's essential health benefits such as maternity care and engage in practices including retroactive coverage rescissions and lifetime or annual caps. In previous [letters](#) to HHS, senators have called for restoring a three-month limit for plans, making renewing plans more difficult, limiting the ability of consumers to purchase back-to-back junk plans, and removing junk plans from ACA marketplaces during open enrollment periods. During the pandemic, the US has been under continuous Medicaid enrollment and Medicaid/CHIP increased over 30% to 19.5 million. An estimated 15-18 million people, including

6.7 million children will face the possibility of losing coverage. States have until May 2024 to complete this process and Medicaid enrollees may be able to regain coverage through the ACA's federal or state marketplaces.



[Humana to exit employer insurance business to focus on government plans](#), by Sriparna Roy, Reuters, 2/23/23

TMR Topline – Humana Inc. announced that it will leave the employer-based insurance business over the next two years to focus primarily on Medicare and its specialty businesses. These include Medicaid, Medicare Advantage (MA), the Tricare military benefit and CenterWell healthcare services that offers primary care for older Americans. Humana raised its MA forecast from 625,000 to at least 775,000 members. *"The exit from the commercial group business makes strategic sense as it enables the company to focus resources on medicare advantage business,"* J.P. Morgan analyst Lisa Gill said. The company does not expect the exit to impact its full-year 2023 forecast given that the businesses generated less than 10% of its 2021 total revenue of \$83 billion.

TMR's Take: Is employer-sponsored health insurance in jeopardy? Will Congress act to protect Americans disenrolled from Medicaid from buying junk plans with limited coverage? Clearly, the next year will be marked by turmoil in the health insurance marketplace.



[What we know about Energy Department's Covid lab leak conclusion](#), by Julia Mueller, The Hill, 2/26/23

TMR Topline – The Wall Street Journal reported that the Energy Department has concluded with *"low confidence"* that the Covid-19 virus emerged from a laboratory in China. The conclusion that a lab mishap was behind the Covid-19 outbreak was based on *"new intelligence"* and further study. According to the WSJ the FBI had previously determined with *"moderate confidence"* that a lab leak caused the Covid outbreak. Four other agencies and the National Intelligence Council believe with *"low confidence"* that the pandemic was sparked by natural transmission involving an infected animal. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan responded to the WSJ report, [saying](#) the intelligence community hasn't come up with a *"definitive answer"* on the question. There is consensus that the

virus wasn't the product of a biological weapons program in China.



[Is bird flu the next pandemic?](#), by Nichola Hill, Boston Globe, 2/21/23
TMR Topline – Will bird flu, another fast-mutating virus that originates in

animals, be the start of the next pandemic or is the capacity of the virus to gain human-to-human transmission still out of reach? While human infections with the H5N1 virus are rare, more than 150 million birds have been [culled](#) due to this strain, and infections have been reported in wild mammals, including a single [mink farm in Spain](#). Human infections are rare but deadly with a [56 percent fatality rate](#) versus [about 1.1 percent for Americans infected with Covid-19](#) prior to vaccination. Bird flu vaccine stockpiles in the US are small, but thanks to Covid, mRNA technology now exists to help scale-up production of vaccines for the public against the latest H5N1 strain.

TMR's Take: Whether it's a lab leak or [zoonotic transfer](#), Covid-19's origin may never be pinned down due to China's early lack of cooperation with the World Health Organization. Rather, priority must be placed on preventing the next pandemic. America's public health infrastructure must be bolstered and its interoperability brought into the 21st century.



[1,600 physicians at New York, California systems file petitions to unionize](#), by Alan Condon, Becker's

Hospital Review, 2/24/23

TMR Topline – A combined 1,600 physicians from [Loma Linda \(Calif.\) University Health](#) and the [University at Buffalo](#) (N.Y.) argue that their ability to provide quality care is suffering amid burnout caused by poor working conditions, low wages, excessive workloads and unaddressed mental health needs, the UAPD said in a news release. The physicians argue that health systems continue to layer additional demands on them as they work in difficult conditions. Union activity has [increased](#) among physicians and nurses throughout the pandemic as they seek greater hospital investments in working conditions, staffing and other resources to support patient care. Recently 82% of about 1,200 interns and residents at New York City's Montefiore Medical Center [voted](#) to join the Committee of Interns and Residents, a local of the Service Employees International Union.