

## Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Feb. 15, 2021

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Read *AMA Morning Rounds®*' most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of Feb. 15, 2021 – Feb. 19, 2021.

### **Biden administration moves to roll back Medicaid work requirements**

The New York Times (2/12, Kliff, Sanger-Katz) reported, “The Biden administration is beginning to roll back a signature Trump administration health policy goal of requiring people to work to receive Medicaid coverage.” These “work requirements, a longstanding conservative goal, were a policy priority for” former CMS administrator Seema Verma. According to the Times, “Medicaid waivers are discretionary, and they can be easily withdrawn by the secretary of Health and Human Services.” (Free registration is required to view content.)

The Hill (2/12, Sullivan) reported, “The Biden administration sent letters to states that had previously been approved for work requirements informing them that the federal government is moving to revoke the waivers that had been granted allowing the policy.” These letters from CMS said “the agency has ‘preliminarily’ determined to revoke the policy and gives the states 30 days to provide information contesting the decision.”

Modern Healthcare (2/12, Subscription Publication) reported the policy change came “just two weeks after President Joe Biden ordered federal health officials to reexamine policies that make it more difficult for individuals to access or afford coverage, including Medicaid work requirements.” (Publication subscription is required for full or unlimited access.)

The AP (2/12, Jaffe) reported that a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services statement “highlighted the coronavirus pandemic – with high unemployment exacerbating the public health crisis – as a key concern in ensuring Americans face no roadblocks to getting health care.”

## Number of MIS-C cases reportedly increasing across the United States

The New York Times (2/16, Belluck) reports physicians across the U.S. “have been seeing a striking increase in the number of young people with” Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). In addition, “more patients are now very sick than during the first wave of cases, which alarmed [physicians] and parents around the world last spring.” MIS-C “remains rare,” but the latest figures from the CDC “show 2,060 cases in 48 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, including 30 deaths,” and 69% “of reported cases have affected Latino or Black young people, which experts believe stems from socioeconomic and other factors that have disproportionately exposed those communities to the virus.” (Free registration is required to view content.)

## Biden administration to expand COVID-19 testing, support effort to track variants

NBC News (2/17) reports, “The Biden administration said it will spend \$1.6 billion to expand [COVID-19] testing in schools and underserved areas, increase testing supply production and expand genomic sequencing, a move administration officials described as a ‘bridge’ until Congress approves more funding.”

CNBC (2/17, Feuer) reports, “The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense will invest \$650 million to expand testing in K-8 schools and ‘underserved congregate settings, such as homeless shelters,’ the White House said.” In a statement, HHS Acting Secretary Norris Cochran said, “As part of the President’s national strategy to combat COVID-19, we will deploy every available resource to ensure that more individuals and families have access to testing options during this unprecedented time and that our nation is prepared to contain and prevent the spread of possible variants.”

In addition, the New York Times (2/17, Zimmer, Weiland) reports the Biden administration pledged almost \$200 million to support a new effort to better identify and track variants of SARS-CoV-2. The White House referred to the amount as a “down payment” to support laboratories sequencing virus samples. (Free registration is required to view content.)

## **AMA takes down public display of founder, removes name from annual awards**

Modern Healthcare (2/17, Johnson, Subscription Publication) reports, “The American Medical Association has removed a public display of its founder and taken his name off of one of its most prestigious annual awards as the organization seeks to reconcile its past discriminatory practices as part of its efforts to address systemic racism as a public health threat.” On Wednesday, in an opinion editorial posted to its website, American Medical Association CEO James L. Madara, M.D., “called the moving of a bust and display of Dr. Nathan Davis from public view at its Chicago headquarters to its archives a necessary step toward reconciling the AMA’s past actions of discrimination.” (Publication subscription is required for full or unlimited access.)

MedPage Today (2/17) reports that Dr. Madara said, “We can’t erase history, but we can decide the appropriate way to recognize individuals from our past.” And “despite his ‘considerable and important’ contributions to the medical field, Madara wrote, Davis’s actions ‘limited opportunities’ and effectively ‘silenced’ Black and women physicians in organized medicine, by excluding them from AMA’s House of Delegates.”

Healthcare Finance News (2/17, Lagasse) reports that Dr. Madara also said, “Honest self-examination is a critically important step to better understanding ourselves, to heal old wounds, and to take corrective actions to address ongoing societal harms.”

*Editor’s Note: To read Dr. Madara’s full leadership viewpoint, [click here](#).*

## **Biden administration to pledge \$4B for Covax effort**

The Washington Post (2/18, Rauhala, Cunningham, Taylor) reports the Biden administration “is throwing its support behind” Covax, “a global push to distribute coronavirus vaccines equitably, pledging \$4 billion to a multilateral effort.” During “a Group of Seven meeting of leaders of the world’s largest economies Friday, President Biden will announce an initial \$2 billion in funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to be used by the Covax Facility, senior administration officials said in a briefing.” The U.S. “will release an additional \$2 billion over two years once other donors have made good on their pledges and will use this week’s G-7 summit to rally other countries to do more.”

USA Today (2/18, Shesgreen, Subramanian) reports the funding for this initiative will come from money “already appropriated by Congress for international vaccination efforts and will not impact the Biden administration’s campaign to inoculate Americans,” according to an unnamed administration official.

The Los Angeles Times (2/18, Megerian) reports the official stated, “We think it is vital to take a role in beating the pandemic globally, and put U.S. leadership out there to do this. ... Decreasing the burden of disease decreases the risk to everyone in the world, including Americans.”

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