

10 health stories that mattered: Dec. 16–20

- Federal government cuts to refugee health care are invalid and breach international laws, refugee advocates told the Federal Court. The government should not have reduced health coverage without consulting the provinces, suggested lawyers and doctors with the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers and Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care.
- Health Canada announced \$11.5 million in funding for a national project to prevent illicit drug use among youth. The project, led by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, will focus on education, prevention standards and building partnerships among prevention workers.
- An editorial in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggesting vitamin and mineral supplements are ineffective and a waste of money has drawn the ire of the Canadian Health Food Association, a trade association for makers of natural health and organic products. The association suggests that vitamins and other natural food products address nutritional deficiencies caused by “inadequate or inappropriate intake of food.”
- Hypertension Canada is skeptical of new US blood pressure guidelines that aim to reduce the number of people aged 60-plus taking blood pressure medications. The guidelines don’t prioritize “risk status,” according to Hypertension Canada spokesperson Dr. Raj Padwal, and could lead to higher rates of strokes and cardiovascular disease.
- Canadian prisons facilitate HIV transmission by compromising access to treatment, according to a new study from the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. The researchers recommend improving treatment programs and implementing harm reduction strategies such as needle exchanges.
- The federal government has “betrayed” Ontario by reducing the promised increase in health transfers to the province, says Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews. A 6% increase had been promised to all provinces, but Ontario will receive only a 3.4% increase in 2014/15, putting the province out \$300 million.
- H1N1 has returned as the predominant influenza strain in British Columbia. Health officials are recommending the flu vaccine for youth and people with chronic conditions, in particular, because H1N1 poses a greater health risk to these populations.
- Ontario plans to establish community-based specialty clinics to improve access to routine, low-risk health procedures. The clinics will offer services that do not require overnight hospital stays, such as cataract and colonoscopy procedures.
- Alberta appointed its first “Health Advocate,” who will be responsible for helping Albertans navigate the health care system. Mary Marshall, a lawyer with experience in health law and policy, assumed the role Jan. 1, 2014.
- Medical errors and accidents are increasing in Quebec, according to the province’s Ministry of Health and Social Services. From April to September, there were 227 597 documented medical mishaps, an increase of 8 363 (or 3.7%) from the same period last year.

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