

Ten health stories that mattered: Jan. 27–31

- Out-of-pocket health care expenses increased 3.3% in 2012 to \$2285 per person, according to Statistics Canada. Those 65 years and older allocated 6.4% of their spending to health care, compared to 2.8% for people under 30.
- Teen smoking prevalence was lower in 2012 — at 11% — than ever before, according to *Tobacco Use in Canada: Patterns and Trends 2014 Edition*. Prevalence was highest (22%) among adults age 15–34. Overall, 16.1% of Canadians smoked in 2012, compared with 17.3% in 2011.
- Canadians in several provinces will soon be able to get information on how much fat, sodium and sugar is in food at some chain restaurants, including Tim Hortons and McDonald's. So far, 17 chains are voluntarily implementing the Informed Dining program, sponsored by the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association.
- Hundreds of patients with heart conditions in Montréal, Quebec, are at risk of running out of flecainide because of an unexpected shortage, reports the *Montreal Gazette*. Only one Canadian drug company manufactures flecainide, which is used to prevent and treat cardiac arrhythmias. Health Canada says the drug should be available again by mid-February. The *Gazette* reports that some patients have already run out.
- Nearly every province and territory is placing late-season orders to meet a surge in demand for the flu shot. This flu season marks the first time since the 2010/11 H1N1 pandemic that Canada has ordered extra vaccine, reports the Public Health Agency of Canada. Another 400 000 doses have been secured in addition to the 10.8 million doses ordered at the start of the flu season.
- The Midwives Association of British Columbia wants major regulatory changes and more funding for midwives to meet growing demand as fewer family physicians practise obstetrics, reports CBC News. Since 2000, 20 rural maternity services have closed, yet the number of births is projected to increase 17% in the next decade.
- Ontario's government and various partners will spend \$60 million to ensure patients with mental illness get treatment when they are physically ill. The Medical Psychiatry Alliance will develop new screening and diagnostic tools, and test ways to deliver psychiatric care at home. It will also bolster training through a simulation centre and clinical training for medical students.
- Advocacy groups and some politicians are urging Health Canada to decide whether to approve a prescription drug that terminates pregnancy, reports CBC News. The application was made more than two years ago; usually, it takes nine months for drugs to go through the approval process. Mifepristone, or RU-486, can be used to terminate pregnancies of up to nine weeks.
- Running deficits and poor management of sick leave and overtime, are among the problems at the Eastern Regional Health Authority, according to Newfoundland and Labrador's auditor general. A report states that the authority had a deficit of \$3 million, despite a 22% increase in budget over the past five years.
- In the wake of several soldiers committing suicide in the past few months, the Department of National Defence is hiring 54 mental health professionals, reports CBC News. The need for the workers was first identified a decade ago during the war with Afghanistan, but was delayed by a lack of funding and political will. — Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

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