HEALTH VITAL DIRECTIONS

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) released a publication on crosscutting priorities that provides a succinct blueprint to address challenges to Americans’ health and health care that span beyond debates over insurance coverage. The paper is part of the NAM’s Vital Directions for Health and Health Care Initiative, which conducted a comprehensive national health and health care assessment over the past 18 months.

Written by the initiative’s bipartisan steering committee, the publication presents a streamlined framework of eight policy directions consisting of four priority actions and four essential infrastructure needs to advance American health, health care, and scientific progress. The paper can be obtained at https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Vital-Directions-for-Health-Health-Care-Priorities-from-a-National-Academy-of-Medicine-Initiative.pdf.

MORTALITY PATTERNS

A paper from the Brookings Institution reveals that while midlife mortality rates continue to fall among all education classes in most of the rich world, middle-aged non-Hispanic whites with a high school diploma or less have experienced increasing midlife mortality since the late 1990s. This result involving men and women similarly from deep rural areas to large central cities is due to both rises in the number of “deaths of despair”—death by drugs, alcohol and suicide—and to a slowdown in progress against mortality from heart disease and cancer, the two largest killers in middle age.

The combined effect means that mortality rates of whites with no more than a high school degree, which were around 30% lower than mortality rates of blacks in 1999, grew to be 30% higher than blacks by 2015.

The paper can be obtained at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6_casedeaton.pdf.

ACCREDITATION

A new report from the Congressional Research Service (CRS) addresses the important topic of accreditation of higher education institutions. Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) authorizes programs that provide financial assistance to students to assist them in obtaining a postsecondary education at certain institutions of higher education (IHEs). Institutions wanting to participate in Title IV federal student aid programs must meet several requirements, including being accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a reliable authority on the quality of the education being offered.

Each of three general types of accrediting agencies serves a specific purpose. Regional accrediting agencies operate in six regions of the U.S. and concentrate their reviews on institutions within specific regions of the country. National accrediting agencies operate across the U.S. and review institutions with a common theme (e.g., religiously affiliated institutions). Programmatic accrediting agencies operate nationwide and review programs and single-purpose institutions.

The HEA continues to await reauthorization. Congress may choose that important piece of legislation to focus on several issues that may include further development of institutional quality measures, the potential to restructure or streamline the accreditation system, accreditation’s role in the changing higher education landscape, and transparency and potential conflicts of interest in the accreditation process.

Many HEA programs were authorized through fiscal year 2014 and were extended for an additional year, through fiscal year 2015. More recently, most HEA programs were extended through April 28, 2017, under the Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017 (P.L. 114-254).

The report can be obtained at https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43826.pdf.
RWJF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Evidence for Action (E4A), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, funds research that expands the evidence base needed to build a Culture of Health. The mission is to support rigorously designed quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research that yields convincing findings regarding the population health, well-being, and equity impacts of specific policies, programs and partnerships. The Foundation is interested especially in research examining the health impacts of programmatic or policy interventions that address factors outside the domain of health care services or public health practice. Higher education institutions are among the eligible applicants.

An informational webinar is scheduled for July 14th to provide an overview of the CFP and offer an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions about the program and grant-making process. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Applicants first must submit a two-page letter of intent (LOI).

Additional information can be obtained at https://anr.rwjf.org/viewCfp.do?cfpId=1224&cfpOverviewId=

New Connections is a career development program for early career researchers, providing support to grantees and other individuals who are part of a network of eligible researchers. Through grantmaking, mentorship, career development and networking, New Connections enhances the research capacity of its grantees and network members. The researchers in this program come from multiple disciplines (health, social sciences, business, urban planning, architecture and engineering); work to build the case for a Culture of Health with strong qualitative and quantitative research skills; and produce and translate timely research results.

Grants of up to $50,000 each will be awarded through this program. A total of up to 20 grants will be awarded. Of the 20 grants awarded in this funding round, up to two grants will be designated for New Connections-Policies for Action awards. Grants will be 12 months in duration. Deadline for receipt of full proposals is May 16, 2017 (3 p.m. ET).

An applicant web conference will be conducted on April 6, 2017 (1 p.m. ET). Registration is required. More information can be obtained at https://cc.readytalk.com/registration/#?meeting=szz14stdb0yb&campaign=sdln2h1vdq8z.

HEALTH WORKFORCE RESEARCH

Researchers on March 16, 2017 unveiled the report, “Health Workforce Research Centers: Key Findings 2013-2016,” that synthesizes new findings on the U.S. health workforce from six research centers and a technical center all funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Since 2013, these Health Workforce Research Centers collectively have conducted nearly 70 studies that shed light on how health workforce needs are changing in response to the rapidly changing U.S. health landscape.

The new report offers significant insight into three themes:

- Understanding evolving health workforce roles and team configurations
- Spotlighting job growth and career paths in middle and low-skilled health professions and
- Identifying workforce strategies to increase access to high-quality health care

This effort is designed to provide timely and topical health workforce research to strengthen the public’s understanding of health workforce and inform health workforce policy discussions at the national, state, and local levels. The report can be obtained at http://online.fliphtml5.com/culo/uvit/#p=1.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Recent years have involved an emergence of a growing and disjointed landscape of alternative providers of postsecondary learning. A group of organizations with an interest in alternative learning is advocating that a new system of quality assurance is needed. Led by the Presidents’ Forum at Excelsior College and the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, a report suggests that the collection of organizations (accreditors, institutional consortiums and others) could band together to play one of several possible roles, e.g., an association of quality assurers representing their interests with federal agencies, universities and employers. The document can be obtained at https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/CQAL%20WP%20Proposal%20Draft%20or%20Comment.pdf. Parties with an interest on commenting can do so until April 15, 2017 at the following site: tgoodyear@excelsior.edu.