



NFL's top 25 QBs of the 21st century

SPORTS, 1B

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Physicians who authored a New England Journal of Medicine article found that the WISer program could cause “considerable suffering for patients,” citing as an example a person with excruciating pain caused by spinal stenosis who is denied access to lumbar decompression. PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

AI to review Medicare claims in pilot program

Profit incentive raises concerns over restrictions of care

Stephanie Innes
Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new Medicare program that uses artificial intelligence to review medical claims is set to launch in six states. Critics worry it will lead to patients being denied necessary care and more red tape for providers.

The controversial new six-year pilot program, set to begin Jan. 1, is a model that makes use of “leveraging enhanced technologies” operated by private, for-profit companies to authorize – and possibly deny – certain medical care for people enrolled in traditional Medicare, often also known as original Medicare. The enhanced technologies include AI.

Some providers and a group of Democrats in Congress have tried to put a stop to the federal pilot program, which is called WISer (Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction), but their efforts have not been successful.

Sen. Mark Kelly, a Democrat from Arizona, criticized WISer on the social media platform X, characterizing it as a way for AI companies to profit off of denying care to seniors.

Officials with the federal Centers for



The Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction, or WISer, will use “enhanced technologies” operated by private, for-profit companies to authorize – and possibly deny – certain medical care for people enrolled in traditional Medicare.

Medicare & Medicaid Services say the program is designed to protect taxpayers. They say it will cut down on wasteful spending in Medicare, which is primarily for ages 65 and over, as well as some who are younger with certain disabilities and those with end-stage renal failure. The six states in the pilot pro-

gram are Arizona, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington.

CMS administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, who has made “crushing” Medicare fraud a priority, has said that the model will help bring Medicare into the 21st

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Note to readers

We will not be printing a paper on Thursday, Jan. 1, but will be providing it to you via the eNewspaper. You can always find the latest news on our website, mobile app, newsletters and social media. Subscribers can access the eNewspaper by going to our website and clicking on eNewspaper in the black navigation bar.

Illinois is giving \$100K to food pantries

Nida Tazeen
AI-assisted reporter
USA TODAY NETWORK

Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs is returning \$100,000 in unclaimed funds to food pantries across the state.

The initiative is part of the treasurer’s ICash program, which focuses each December on returning money to nonprofit groups that assist those in need, according to a community announcement. This year, the focus is on food pantries that have faced increased demand and stretched resources after a federal government shutdown halted food assistance to many Illinois families in November.

“Food pantries always step up to feed people in need,” Frerichs said in the announcement. “It’s been a challenging year with federal cutbacks to food banks earlier in the year. The Trump administration opting to cut off food assistance to our state’s neediest folks last month was a double whammy. We wanted to see if we could help, when our local food pantries put meals on the table for millions of Illinoisans.”

On Dec. 18, Frerichs visited the food pantry at 4 KIDS Sake in the southwest suburbs to return \$5,500 to the nonprofit. Twice this year, thieves stole the catalytic converters from its donation trucks to sell for scrap metal. The latest incident happened in November.

The Bolingbrook nonprofit was founded in 2012 by Theresa Watson when she was 17 and noticed many children’s needs were not being met. Since then, the charity has helped more than 10,000 children and operates a food pantry and resale shop.

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Dixon YMCA enters partnership with Rock River Valley

Nida Tazeen
AI-assisted reporter
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Dixon Family YMCA has entered a one-year management agreement with the YMCA of Rock River Valley to enhance operations and services.

The agreement, which began Dec. 1, aims to provide executive leadership support to the Dixon Family YMCA, ac-

cording to a community announcement. The deal is funded by a grant from YMCA of the USA and is intended to bring additional experience, resources and mentorship to support the Dixon Y’s growth.

“This partnership is a bridge to the future,” said Ermir Ramadani, president of the Dixon Family YMCA Board of Directors. “It allows us to strengthen our local YMCA, bring in proven expertise

and continue the incredible momentum that has been building in recent months. This partnership gives us the tools and support to achieve our community’s vision for a thriving, sustainable YMCA.”

The Dixon YMCA board has been working with community leaders, including those with the City of Dixon and Discover Dixon, to stabilize finances, enhance childcare operations and

strengthen programming.

Rock River Valley CEO to assist with leadership

Brent Pentenburg, CEO of the YMCA of Rock River Valley, will serve as a resource to the Dixon YMCA leadership team. The Rock River Valley YMCA also

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