

# The Infinitus Group

*MEDICARE - GROUP - INDIVIDUAL - P&C*

Monthly Newsletter

[www.theinfinitus.com](http://www.theinfinitus.com)



## The Standard to Acquire Allstate Employer Voluntary Benefits Business; Companies Announce Distribution Partnership - \$2 Billion

StanCorp Financial Group, Inc., (The Standard) and The Allstate Corporation announced August 13, 2024 a definitive agreement under which The Standard will acquire Allstate's Employer Voluntary Benefits business for approximately \$2 billion and enter into a product distribution partnership. The transaction is expected to close in the first half of 2025, subject to regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions.

The Standard and Allstate are leading workplace benefits providers with deep expertise in benefits administration and a shared commitment to customer service. The Standard, a top group life, disability and ancillary benefit provider, was founded in 1906 and sold its first employee benefits policy in 1951, a case that remains in force today. Allstate's Employer Voluntary Benefits business is an industry leader in supplemental and voluntary workplace benefits including Whole Life, Universal Life, Accident, Hospital Indemnity, Cancer and Critical Illness coverage.

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# Allstate



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# The Future Of Medicare Advantage

The Medicare Advantage program is undergoing its biggest shifts in more than two decades. Payers can take steps now to mount a strategic, agile response as the changes unfold.

As Medicare Advantage (MA) payers continue to be buffeted by regulatory and market changes that could dampen margins, payer leaders should not lose sight of the importance of investing now to stabilize their businesses for the long run. A critical area of focus for leaders should be the Medicare Advantage Star Ratings program. While 4+ star performance is becoming table stakes, plans that emphasize achieving better Star-program performance tend to have an advantage.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) introduced Star Ratings in 2007 to improve the quality of care for members, with the expectation that the ratings would evolve over time. To date, CMS continues to refine the program to encourage plans toward targeted new priorities. But MA payers often get caught up in the complexity and number of changes that have been made to the Star Ratings program through the years. Some have debated the program's value,<sup>1</sup> deeming the rating system challenging to implement well given the frequency of the changes, and questioning the effectiveness of the Star measures to improve clinical outcomes. [Read More Here...](#)



## Trump, Harris Tread In ACA Ambiguity

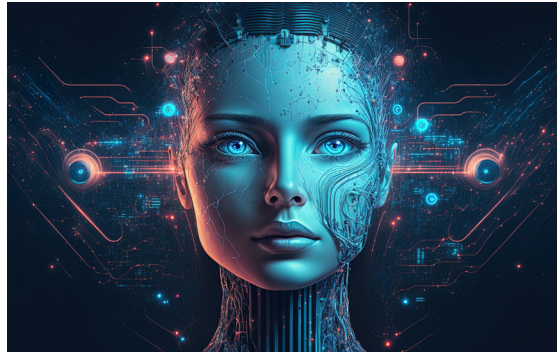
Is the Affordable Care Act a central issue in the 2024 presidential election or not?

With fewer than 90 days until the election, the answer remains unclear as Democratic and Republican campaigns operate with ambiguity when it comes to healthcare plans, and particularly in the use of actions “repeal” and “replace.”

The Republican Party’s official platform, presented at its convention in Milwaukee in July, includes no mention of the ACA and limited references to other healthcare reforms. Former President Donald Trump campaign’s policy plan, Agenda 47, contains sparse healthcare policy proposals that are included in a chapter aimed at addressing affordability.

The Democratic National Convention began Aug. 19. Leading up to it, Vice President Kamala Harris has criticized the Republican stance on the ACA, portraying the Republican candidate as a threat to the law. At her Aug. 6 rally in Philadelphia to announce her pick for vice president, Ms. Harris said Mr. Trump would “end the Affordable Care Act and take us back to a time when insurance companies had the power to deny people with pre-existing conditions” if given the chance. [Read More Here...](#)

# Why Will Healthcare Be The Industry That Benefits The Most From AI?



The healthcare industry has been a severe laggard in the adoption of tech (software in particular): it has consistently spent less than half on IT/software spend as a percentage of revenue versus peer industries, and workflows are primarily dominated by manual processes and legacy tools like faxes and phone calls. You don't see anything close to the equivalent of the likes of Salesforce, Slack, JIRA, Notion dominating the app layer in the way workers do their jobs, as you do in other industries.

Whereas we historically have viewed the low adoption of software as a liability, we now view that as an asset—we don't face the same sunk cost bias that might be slowing other industries down from taking full advantage of the latest AI innovations. Other industries have spent hundreds of billions on enterprise software apps and are now faced with the decision of whether to rip those last-gen tools out and effectively spend additional billions on the modern AI tools that are now emerging.

In healthcare, the question is simply—should I throw more bodies and fax machines at the problem, or should I jump to adopt AI without the baggage of last-generation workflow apps getting in my way?  
[Read More Here...](#)

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## US Uninsured Rate Rises To 8.2%

The number of people in the US without health insurance has been steadily rising since the official end of the Covid-19 public health emergency was declared in May 2023.

The uninsured rate rose to 8.2% (or roughly 27 million people) in Q1 2024 after falling to a record low of 7.2% in Q2 2023, CDC data shows. That low was largely thanks to the Medicaid continuous enrollment policy that allowed all beneficiaries to keep their coverage until May 2023, according to Daniel Polsky, a health economist and professor at Johns Hopkins Carey Business School.

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## Medicare Advantage Insurers Ranked By Prior Authorization Denial Rates

Medicare Advantage insurers denied 7.4% of prior authorization requests in 2022, according to data published by KFF.

In a report published Aug. 5, KFF examined data submitted to CMS by Medicare Advantage insurers in 2022.

The number of denials increased slightly from 6% in 2021. CVS Health denied the highest percentage of prior authorization requests in 2021 and 2022. The company denied 13% of prior authorization requests it received in 2022, up from 12% in 2021.

Humana had the highest number of prior authorization requests per member in 2022, at 2.9.

Here's how major MA insurers compare on the number of prior authorizations and denial rates:

### Average number of prior authorization requests per member (2022)

**Humana: 2.9**

**Elevance Health (Anthem): 2.6**

**Anthem BCBS plans: 2.3**

**Centene: 2.2**

**Other BCBS plans: 2.0**

**All other plans: 2.0**

**CVS Health: 1.1**

**Cigna: 0.9**

**UnitedHealthcare: 0.9**

**Kaiser Permanente: 0.5**

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## Medicare Announces Lower Prices On 10 Common, High-cost Drugs

The Biden administration said Thursday that it had reached an agreement with drugmakers to lower prices on the 10 costliest prescription drugs under Medicare.

It's part of the federal government's first-ever drug pricing negotiations, a cost reduction it claims could help ease the financial burden on the estimated 1 in 7 older adults in the U.S. struggling to pay for their medications.

Here are the negotiated prices for the drugs, based on a 30-day supply:

- **Eliquis**, a blood thinner from Bristol Myers Squibb and Pfizer: \$231 negotiated price, down from \$521 list price.
- **Xarelto**, a blood thinner from Johnson & Johnson: \$197 negotiated price, down from \$517 list price Healthcare.
- **Januvia**, a diabetes drug from Merck: \$113 negotiated price, down from \$527 list price.
- **Jardiance**, a diabetes drug from Boehringer Ingelheim and Eli Lilly: \$197 negotiated price, down from \$573 list price.
- **Enbrel**, a rheumatoid arthritis drug from Amgen: \$2,355 negotiated price, down from \$7,106 list price.
- **Imbruvica**, a drug for blood cancers from AbbVie and Johnson & Johnson: \$9,319 negotiated price, down from \$14,934 list price.

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# States Ranked By Total Residents With Employer-Sponsored Health Coverage

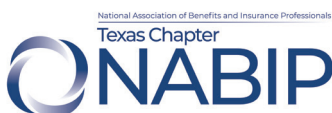
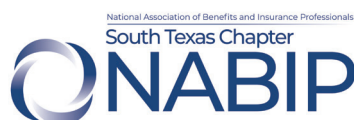
Eight states have at least five million residents that receive health coverage from their employer, according to AHIP's 2024 "Coverage at Work" report published in July.

States ranked by total residents with employer-sponsored health coverage:

California: 17.95 million  
Texas: 13.85 million  
New York: 9.05 million  
Florida: 8.74 million  
Illinois: 6.53 million  
Pennsylvania: 6.39 million  
Ohio: 5.89 million  
Georgia: 5.12 million  
New Jersey: 4.96 million  
Michigan: 4.94 million  
North Carolina: 4.81 million  
Virginia: 4.42 million  
Washington: 3.99 million  
Massachusetts: 3.67 million  
Indiana: 3.46 million  
Tennessee: 3.31 million  
Arizona: 3.27 million  
Maryland: 3.24 million  
Minnesota: 3.13 million  
Wisconsin: 3.13 million  
Missouri: 3.10 million  
Colorado: 3 million

South Carolina: 2.30 million  
Alabama: 2.27 million  
Kentucky: 2 million  
Oregon: 1.99 million  
Utah: 1.99 million  
Connecticut: 1.84 million  
Louisiana: 1.81 million  
Oklahoma: 1.68 million  
Iowa: 1.66 million  
Kansas: 1.52 million  
Nevada: 1.46 million  
Arkansas: 1.21 million  
Mississippi: 1.2 million  
Nebraska: 1.03 million  
Idaho: 896,000  
New Hampshire: 759,000  
New Mexico: 742,000  
West Virginia: 741,000  
Hawaii: 679,000  
Maine: 633,000  
Rhode Island: 538,000  
Delaware: 498,000  
Montana: 475,000  
Washington, D.C.: 368,000  
South Dakota: 452,000  
North Dakota: 421,000  
Alaska: 325,000  
Vermont: 300,000  
Wyoming: 284,000  
[Read List Here...](#)

## PROUD MEMBERS OF:



# The Infinitus Group Online/Classroom Training

Join us at The Infinitus Group for our monthly Classroom Training sessions!

On the first Thursday of each month, we offer comprehensive training on various topics, available both in classroom and online formats.

Expect informative emails detailing the upcoming month's discussion topics and convenient links to join our online sessions.

Our meetings commence at 10:00 AM Central time and typically run for one hour.

We're excited to introduce you to our portfolio of products, equipping you with the tools to drive growth in your business.

See you there!



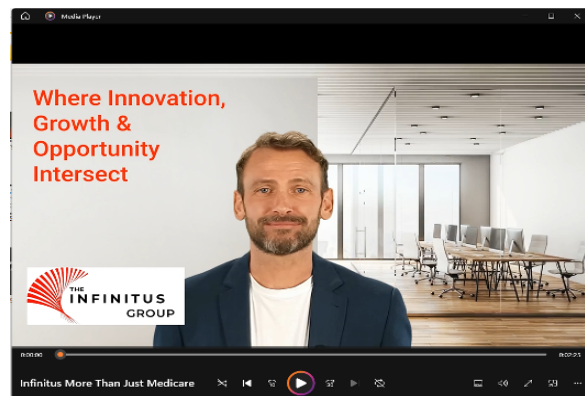
## Marketing

### Marketing - Video Production

**We'll assist in branding both you and your message.**

When you're ready, we can assist you in saving money on the video that brands you and your marketing.

Let us help you get your message out on the services that you offer through **INFINITUS** on your own **YOU TUBE** channel.



# Online / Classroom Training September 2024

Our next monthly training has been rescheduled to **September 4th at 10:00 AM** CT. This change is due to our regular first-Thursday-of-the-month classroom session.

This month's session will cover everything related to Medicare Open Enrollment and everything you need to know.



***Please join using this link:***

***<https://v.ringcentral.com/join/838783301>***  
***Meeting ID: 838783301***

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## **NABIP Upholds Role Of Agents In The ACA Marketplace**

The National Association of Benefits and Insurance Professionals expressed its concern over the recent narrative presented in the Paragon Health Institute's report, which portrays a broad and detrimental view of the role of agents within the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

Paragon Health recently issued a paper, "The Great Obamacare Enrollment Fraud," in which the institute alleged increase in fraudulent enrollment in ACA marketplace plans. The paper's authors contend that those applying for ACA coverage are misestimating their income to qualify for greater subsidies.

The authors further stated that "Unscrupulous brokers are certainly contributing to fraudulent enrollment and the enhanced direct enrollment feature of HealthCare.gov appears to be a problem. Brokers just need a person's name, date of birth, and address to enroll them in coverage, and reports indicate that many people have been recently removed from their plan and enrolled in another plan by brokers who earn commissions by doing so."

Read More Here...

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***You don't have to be great to start,  
but you have to start to be great.***

***-Zig Ziglar***