



Advocacy | Education | Leadership | Collegiality | Member Perks

## Invest to Protect Practices and Patients Renew MMA Membership Today

The challenges facing physicians continue to grow — from administrative burdens to legislative decisions that shape how and where we practice. Now more than ever, a strong, unified physician voice is essential.

In 2026, the Montana Medical Association will continue working to:

- Strengthen the physician voice in key policy decisions
- Preserve the patient-physician relationship
- Protect access to physician-led care across Montana
- Build leadership capacity for the future of our profession
- 

Membership is more than dues — it is an investment in protecting your practice and your patients.

Join or renew with MMA for 2026 and stand with physicians across Montana.

Stronger together.  
Join Here: [MMA Membership](#)

## National Experts Will Connect Important Issues to Our Changing Climate

Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate



[Learn more](#)

## Montana Looks at How it Licenses Professionals

The MMA has a seat on a state task force formed to weigh whether current rules for licensing occupations provide the necessary patient safety protections without creating unnecessary barriers to obtaining a license. MMA Board of Trustee Serena Brewer, DO of Butte was appointed to the task force. Dr. Brewer brings essential experience and knowledge as a primary care physician in a rural community, leader in medical education, and advocate for physician connected care.

KPAX (2/23) HELENA — The Montana Department of Labor and Industry reports that more than 200,000 Montanans — a third of the state's workforce — require a state license in order to do their job.

Over the next six months, a state task force is going to be weighing whether Montana's current rules for licensing occupations are a good fit for today's needs. "How do we protect public safety while ensuring that there's no unnecessary barriers that keep people from working across the state?" said Commissioner of Labor and Industry Sarah Swanson. [Read more](#)

## Hepatitis B Vaccination Rates Among U.S. Newborns Dropped More Than 10 Percentage Points in Past Two Years

MedPage Today (2/23, McCreary) reports, "Hepatitis B vaccination rates among U.S. newborns have fallen by more than 10 percentage points over the past 2 years, reversing 6 years of steady gains, according to an analysis of electronic health records." Researchers observed that "among more than 12 million infants, birth-dose hepatitis B vaccination rates rose from 67.5% in January 2017 to a peak of 83.5% in February 2023 before declining to 73.2% by August 2025." Utilizing an autoregressive integrated moving average model, "the researchers found that vaccination rates beginning in July 2023 fell significantly below forecasted levels, marking a sustained divergence from prior trends." The study was discussed in a JAMA research letter.

[Read more](#)

You may also be interested in: [What doctors wish patients knew about hepatitis A, B and C](#)

## Adolescent Cannabis use Linked to Increased Risk of Psychotic, Bipolar, Depression and Anxiety Disorders

**HealthDay** (2/23, Thompson) reports a study suggests that “teens who use weed are twice as likely to develop psychotic or bipolar disorders,” and are also “more likely to have depression and anxiety.” Researchers stated in background notes that “more than 10% of 12- to 17-year-olds in the U.S. have used weed within the past year,” and that “by their senior year in high school, about 26% of U.S. teenagers have tried it.” Furthermore, “today’s weed has THC levels that exceed 20%, far higher than in previous decades.” For the study, “researchers analyzed health records of more than 463,000 teens aged 13 to 17 who were screened for past-year weed use at Kaiser Permanente Northern California between 2016 and 2023.” Tracking the teens through age 26, researchers observed “that weed use was associated with a doubled risk of psychotic and bipolar disorders; a 34% increased risk of depression; and a 24% increased risk of anxiety.” The [study](#) was published in JAMA Health Forum. [Read more](#)

You may also be interested in: [Cannabis use and health: What physicians should know](#)

This study supports the call for action by the MMA to members of the Children, Family, Health and Human Services Interim Legislative Committee noting medical practices are seeing firsthand the impact of marijuana use. The CFHHS will take up the topic again at its [meeting](#) on March 9 and 10. Contact the MMA Executive Office at [mma@mmaoffice.org](mailto:mma@mmaoffice.org) if you have information to share. Public comment is welcome.

## Influenza Hospitalizations Increase in Montana

NBC Montana (2/23) MISSOULA, Mont. — The latest data released Friday by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services shows an uptick in influenza hospitalizations.

The sixth week of the year saw 44 influenza-related hospitalizations in Montana, compared to 37 a week earlier. The death count from influenza this flu season has also increased to 14.

Flu cases declined during the sixth week of the year, from 1,118 cases to 1,003. Counties with the most cases of flu include: Yellowstone (141), Gallatin (127), Missoula (119), Glacier (74), and Lewis and Clark (71). COVID-19 cases also decreased in the sixth week of the year, from 257 to 224. So far this year, seven people have died of COVID-19. [Read more](#)

## FDA Launches Framework for Accelerating Development of Individualized Therapies for Ultra-Rare Diseases

HHS, WASHINGTON — FEBRUARY 23, 2026 — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) today issued draft guidance for sponsors seeking full approval for targeted individualized therapies by generating substantial evidence of effectiveness and safety when randomized controlled trials are not feasible due to small patient populations.

The draft guidance, issued by the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research and Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, specifically discusses genome editing and RNA-based therapies such as antisense oligonucleotides but leaves open the

potential that this framework may apply to additional tailored therapeutics provided they directly address the underlying specific cause of the disease.

“President Trump promised to accelerate cures for American families — and we are delivering, especially for children with ultra-rare diseases who cannot afford to wait,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. “We are cutting unnecessary red tape, aligning regulation with modern biology, and clearing a path for breakthrough treatments to reach the patients who need them most.”

“This guidance is a critical step the FDA is taking to tailor our regulatory approach to patients with ultra-rare conditions,” said FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, M.D., M.P.H. “It is our priority to remove barriers and exercise regulatory flexibility to encourage scientific advances and deliver more cures and meaningful treatments for patients suffering from rare diseases.”

[Read more](#)

## How A Supreme Court Ruling On Conversion Therapy Could Reshape Health Care Regulation

HealthAffairs (2/23) The Supreme Court will soon decide [a case](#) that could upend how states protect patients from harmful health care practices. In [Chiles v. Salazar](#), the Tenth Circuit upheld Colorado’s ban on conversion therapy for minors, recognizing the practice as a regulated clinical intervention, not constitutionally protected “pure speech.” That distinction is critical. Most behavioral health care—and much of modern medicine—is delivered through words. If the Supreme Court now reframes therapeutic communication as protected expression, states may lose their ability to regulate even dangerous or discredited treatments simply because they are delivered verbally.

Although conversion therapy itself has been widely discredited and condemned by all major medical organizations, the stakes of this case stretch far beyond LGBTQ+ youth. What the Court decides about therapy in this context may determine whether states retain the authority to set evidence-based standards, discipline unsafe practitioners, and intervene when minors are exposed to harmful clinical techniques. In short, the Court’s decision in Chiles will affect more than one form of treatment. It is about the future of health regulation.

After oral argument in November there were sound reasons for anticipating a less-than-maximalist approach. Justices Roberts, Kavanaugh, and Barrett pointed out the sweeping implications of a ruling that gave all treatment delivered through the modality of speech full First Amendment protection. This is consistent with the majority’s decision in 2023, over [the strong written objections](#) of Justices Thomas and Alito, not to hear Tingley v. Ferguson, a very similar case challenging Washington State’s conversion therapy law. [Read more](#)

## Six Ways DPHHS Can Reduce Harm to Medicaid Enrollees when Implementing H.R. 1

Montana Budget & Policy Center (2/18) This year, states will be implementing new red tape reporting requirements for some Medicaid enrollees, and unfortunately, Montana is fast-tracking these changes, which could have a negative impact on Montanans’ accessing Medicaid. In our [first blog](#), we provided an overview of these changes. While the state is required to comply with changes, there are administrative choices it will make that will affect Montanans’ ability to access services they qualify for. Here are six ways the state can make better choices to lessen the harm to

enrollees and applicants during the implementation of H.R. 1's changes to Medicaid Expansion. [Read more](#)

## Survey Shows Most Americans say Vaccines are Safe, Support School Mandates

[Reuters](#) (2/25, Douglas, Lange) reports that a new Reuters/Ipsos survey released Wednesday shows that “a bipartisan majority of Americans believe vaccines are safe and that children should receive them to attend school.” According to the survey, “some 84% of respondents...said vaccines for diseases like measles, mumps and rubella are safe for children. The readings were little changed from when the question was asked in a 2020 Reuters/Ipsos poll.” Furthermore, 74% of respondents “said the government should require healthy children to be vaccinated to attend school, with 23% saying unvaccinated children should be allowed in schools. Nearly all U.S. states mandate vaccination for school enrollment, with some limited exemptions.” [Read more](#)

## Medicare Telehealth Coverage Renewed for Two Years

AMA (2/23) **What's the news:** For the next two years, Medicare patients and physicians will be able to use telehealth services knowing that they will be covered without interruption.

The recently passed government funding package—the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026—renewed the telehealth coverage that so many older adults have relied on since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, an extension that the AMA strongly supports and continues to advocate to make permanent. Find out [how telehealth drives care improvement and saves money](#). [Read more](#)

## New Single-Pill HIV Therapy Promises Boost for Long-Term Virus Survivors

[Financial Times](#) (2/25) A single-pill treatment to suppress HIV proved as effective as existing therapies of up to 11 tablets daily, the latest advance in a scientific “golden age” for treating the virus even as rich countries cut funding to do so.

The new approach, a combined dose of established drugs bictegravir and lenacapavir, worked well for patients who were up to 84 years old and in many cases resistant to standard treatments.

The results are a potential breakthrough for a growing cohort of long-term HIV survivors who are increasingly vulnerable because of ageing, underlying health conditions and the difficulties of managing complex medication schedules.

“The findings are game changing for this group of people, many of whom have lived with HIV for decades, and who have other cardiovascular conditions associated with ageing,” said Chloe Orkin, leader of the work and clinical professor of infection and inequities at Queen Mary University of London. “The participants found the [new] regimen far more convenient.”

The research covered more than 550 people with HIV across 15 countries who had mostly been taking between three and 11 pills a day for their treatment, according to a paper published in [The Lancet](#) on Wednesday. [Read more](#) [Study Article](#)

In Memory Of

# Dwight R. Hiesterman, M.D., age 82 of Helena February 12, 1944 – February 12, 2026

Dwight R. Hiesterman, M.D. of Helena, Montana died at home on the morning of his 82nd Birthday, February 12, 2026, surrounded by his family.

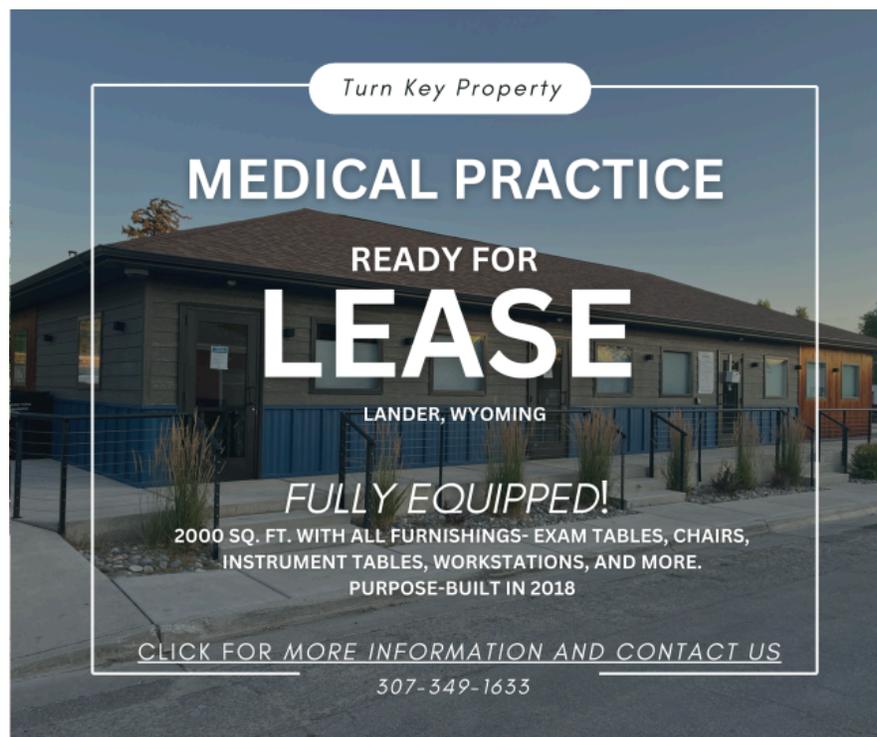
Dwight was born February 12, 1944, in Wichita, Kansas, to Lawrence and Erna (Meier) Hiesterman. Lawrence served in World War II and was killed in Luxembourg when Dwight was one year old. Later his mother remarried Ewald Helms and they had a son, Harvey.

Early years were spent on the farm in north central Kansas, until graduating high school in 1962. He then attended the University of Kansas and the University of Kansas School of Medicine, graduating in 1966 and 1970. While attending KU Dwight met his future wife, Roxanne Griesel of Shawnee Mission, Kansas. They were married during medical school on June 8, 1968. The journey continued to Akron, Ohio, for internship and residency, then back to the University of Kansas for a fellowship in Nephrology.

With the sights on the mountains and pleasures of camping, fishing, and hiking, Dwight and Roxanne set off to Helena, Montana, accompanied by two young children, Gretchen and Ward. Their youngest child, Katrina, arrived in 1979. Dwight began his Internal Medicine and Nephrology practice at the Helena Medical Clinic in 1975 and then had his own practice until 2000. He then worked at Mountain Pacific Quality Health Foundation and eventually became Chief Medical Officer. Professional organizations included the Montana Medical Association and the American College of Physicians. Dwight actively served at First Lutheran Church and Our Redeemers Lutheran Church. A student of history, he was an avid reader of non-fiction with a specific interest in early Montana and World War II. When time allowed, he enjoyed the many benefits of Montana's outdoors with his family.

Dr. Hiesterman had been a member of the MMA since 2007.

[Full Obituary Here](#)



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## MEDICAL PRACTICE

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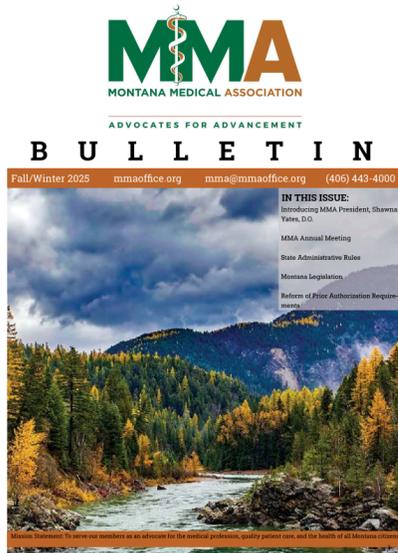
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# Fall/Winter Bulletin Now Available



Our Fall/Winter Bulletin, along with previous issues of MMA Rounds is now available on our website under the "news" tab. Catch up on updates, advocacy highlights, and important news impacting Montana physicians, all in one convenient place. Visit our website to read the latest issue and explore past editions at your convenience.

<https://www.mmaoffice.org/bulletin-and-rounds/>

## Your Care is at Our Core

### Physicians are Patients' Strongest Allies in Health: Every Step of the Way

Montana Medical Association has joined other state medical associations to launch a campaign to elevate physician's reputations, fight legislative battles, and amplify the patient-physician relationship.

**YOUR CARE IS  
AT OUR CORE**

Montana's Physicians

In recent years physicians have faced reputational challenges brought on by broader frustrations with the healthcare system. Recognizing the need to better understand and address these challenges, the American Medical Association's Advocacy Resource Center conducted extensive opinion research and found that Americans want to see more of their physicians. 89% of national voters agree that the doctor-patient relationship is central to health care – but structural factors have habituated them to the idea that physicians are hard to schedule and that they are forced to spend too little time with them. As a result, Your Care is at Our Core was developed directly from these research findings and was created to elevate the message of what drives physicians: trust, empathy, compassion, and time caring and fighting for their patients. Since its launch in January 2024, more than half of state medical associations have chosen to participate in Your Care is at Our Core, including us.

Learn more: <https://www.mmaoffice.org/your-care-is-at-our-core/>

Share your story: [Your Care is at our Core: Gathering Physician Stories](#)

*If you are interested in sharing a testimonial to be posted on our social media platforms, please contact **Lexie Gleasman** [lexie@mmaoffice.org](mailto:lexie@mmaoffice.org)*



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## MEMBERSHIPS DUES & RENEWALS

### 2026 Membership: Renew Your MMA Membership

As the recognized voice of the medical profession in Montana for more than 147 years, the Montana Medical Association and local medical societies have represented Montana's physicians with a keen understanding of unique challenges facing our medical professionals. The ever-changing health care landscape is a reality and the Montana Medical Association is prepared to keep pace with those changing realities.

What we do together, no one physician can do alone. Your membership makes a difference in strengthening the physician's voice, shaping the changing health care landscape, and advancing ambitious clinical and educational initiatives that empowers physicians and positively impacts patient care and the practice of medicine in Montana.

Have an impact through your support of the MMA where the physician voice is unified, patient centered policies are amplified, and capacity can grow to advance medical science. You can easily join or renew now below, or call (406) 443-4000.

[BUY YOUR MMA MEMBERSHIP](#)

### Managing a complex mental health case? **Let's talk.**

Get free psychiatric consults for Montana clinicians treating pregnant/postpartum patients or youth 0-21.

Call 844-406-8725 for a consult.



## ADVOCACY REMINDERS

You can view our VoterVoice at any time to see what issues we are promoting at this [link](#).

If you wish to testify or help with advocacy efforts, please contact Jean Branscum at [jean@mmaoffice.org](mailto:jean@mmaoffice.org), and we can help coordinate.

Additionally, check out our Legislative Advocacy Training video taught by SetPoint Media founder Tara Jensen, which can be viewed [here](#) with your MMA login.

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

March 7, 2026	Climate & Health in the 406	<a href="#">More information here</a>
March 27-28, 2026	HELP Graduation	AC Hotel, Bozeman
March 27-28, 2026	MMA Interim BOT Meeting	Virtual

If you would like your event listed, please email the name, date, and a way to find more information to [mma@mmaoffice.org](mailto:mma@mmaoffice.org).

## MMA Member Perks

### Gohagan & Company Travel Offers

Embark on an exhilarating European adventure steeped in storied history, grand architecture and breathtaking scenery on this fabulous 12-day, 11-night itinerary featuring a deluxe river cruise plus an unforgettable Swiss getaway. Discover the timeless beauty of the Rhine and Moselle as you wind past storybook towns, terraced vineyards and forested hills crowned by castles. Marvel at the sweeping grandeur of the Alps and Lake Geneva.



[Gohagan & Company – Exclusive Ocean Cruises, River Cruises, and Land Tours for Alumni, Affinity and Group Travelers](#)



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## ON-DEMAND VIRTUAL DEA MATE ACT Requirements Course

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MONTANA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

### IS YOUR DEA CERTIFICATE UP FOR RENEWAL?

Complete Mandatory Renewal Requirements in 1 Day!

Don't forget that Montana Medical Association members can receive a discount on training requirements under the MATE ACT regulations. Members can register for on-demand online courses or live webinars [here](#). Be sure to use discount codes to save \$100 at checkout for either on-demand online courses (code: MMAWEB100) or live online courses (code: MMA100).

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Telehealth**  
for Our Members

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## Follow Us On Social Media!

Stay up to date with Association events and initiatives by following us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Montana Medical Association | 2021 Eleventh Avenue, Suite 1 | Helena, MT 59601 US

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