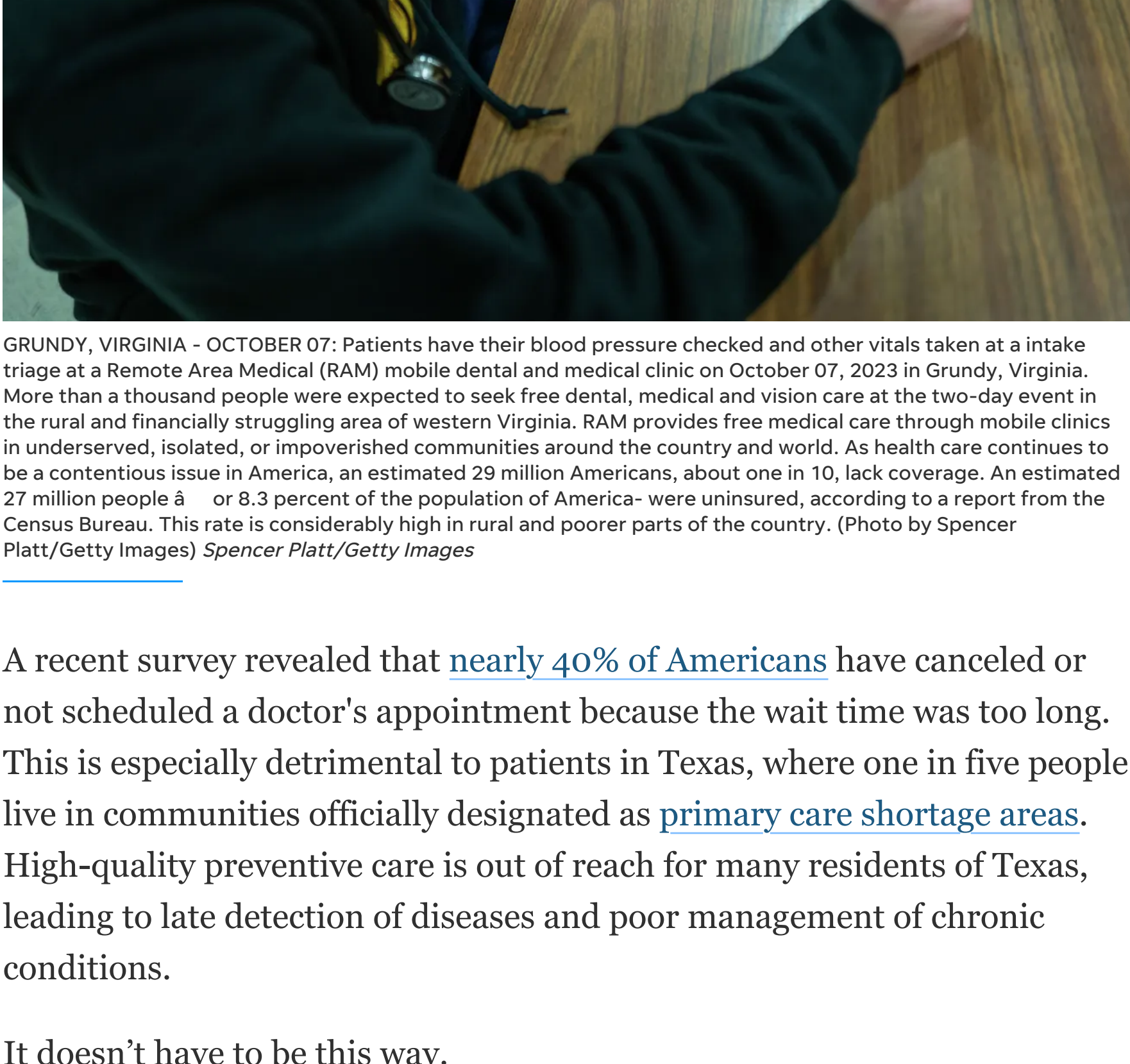


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Want to expand health care access? Entrust more care to nurses | Opinion

Liam Sigaud, Guest columnist

July 6, 2025, 6:00 a.m. CT

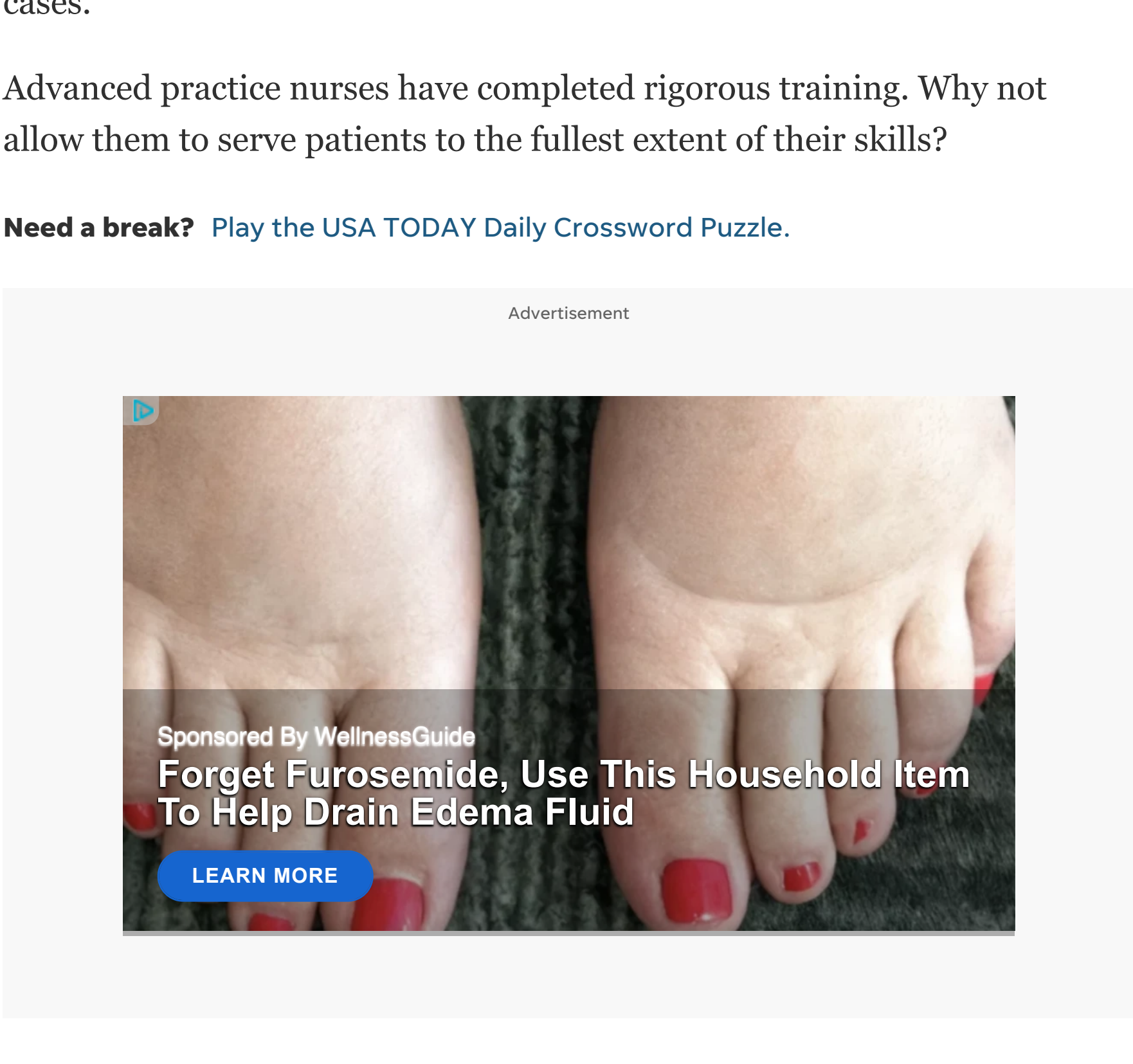


GRUNDY, VIRGINIA - OCTOBER 07: Patients have their blood pressure checked and other vitals taken at an intake triage at a Remote Area Medical (RAM) mobile dental and medical clinic on October 07, 2023 in Grundy, Virginia. More than a thousand people were expected to seek free dental, medical and vision care at the two-day event in the rural and financially struggling area of western Virginia. RAM provides free medical care through mobile clinics in underserved, isolated, or impoverished communities around the country and world. As health care continues to be a contentious issue in America, an estimated 29 million Americans, about one in 10, lack coverage. An estimated 27 million people — or 8.3 percent of the population of America— were uninsured, according to a report from the Census Bureau. This rate is considerably high in rural and poorer parts of the country. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images) Spencer Platt/Getty Images

A recent survey revealed that [nearly 40% of Americans](#) have canceled or not scheduled a doctor's appointment because the wait time was too long. This is especially detrimental to patients in Texas, where one in five people live in communities officially designated as [primary care shortage areas](#). High-quality preventive care is out of reach for many residents of Texas, leading to late detection of diseases and poor management of chronic conditions.

It doesn't have to be this way.

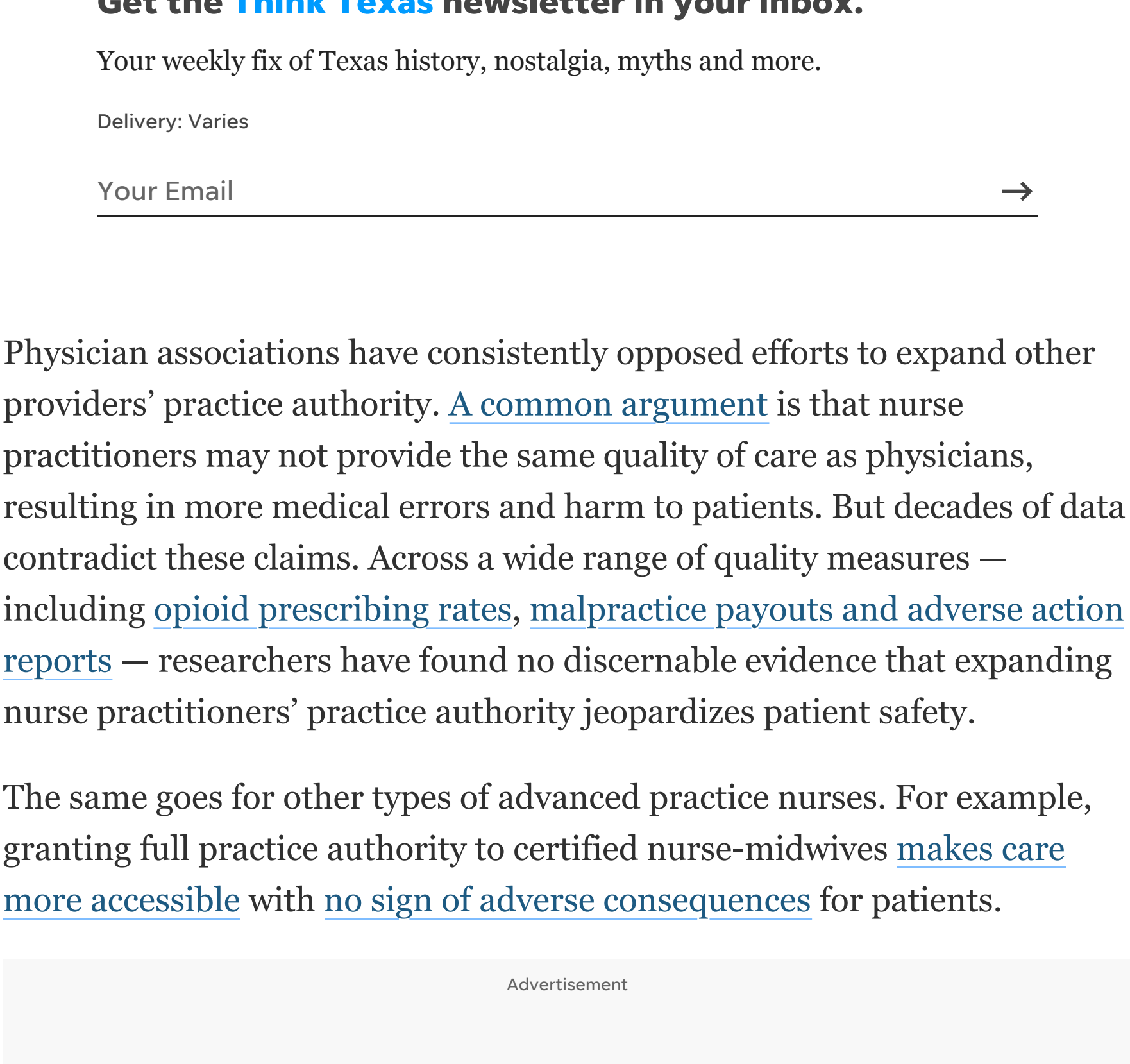
Many states are empowering non-physician health care providers to offer a broader range of services. But lawmakers in Texas have repeatedly turned down bills that would grant advanced practice nurses, including certified nurse-midwives and nurse practitioners, the authority to prescribe routine medications — such as antibiotics and drugs to manage blood pressure — and deliver other types of care without needing a physician's signature.



Twenty-eight states have already enacted similar reforms, and patients are reaping the benefits of more accessible care. Expanding the role of advanced practice nurses is especially important for rural communities with few physicians' offices, long driving times to the nearest hospital, and prohibitive wait times for appointments. Permitting advanced practice nurses to practice independently removes bureaucratic hassles and unnecessary costs, while allowing physicians to focus on more complex cases.

Advanced practice nurses have completed rigorous training. Why not allow them to serve patients to the fullest extent of their skills?

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Numerous studies have shown that these reforms deliver significant benefits to patients. Expanding nurse practitioner scope of practice [increases access to healthcare services](#) and the [frequency of routine check-ups](#), reduces costs for patients, reduces hospital re-admissions and [preventable emergency room visits](#), and [improves health outcomes](#). Moreover, nurse practitioners are more likely to work in rural or [underserved communities](#) if their states grants them full practice authority.

While the shortage of primary care physicians is projected to grow even deeper, reaching a [nationwide deficit of up to 40,000 doctors in 2036](#), the supply of nurse practitioners [is soaring](#). Today, there are approximately 100,000 more nurse practitioners in the U.S. than primary care physicians — and the gap is growing every year. Placing artificial limits on the nurse practitioner workforce just doesn't make sense.

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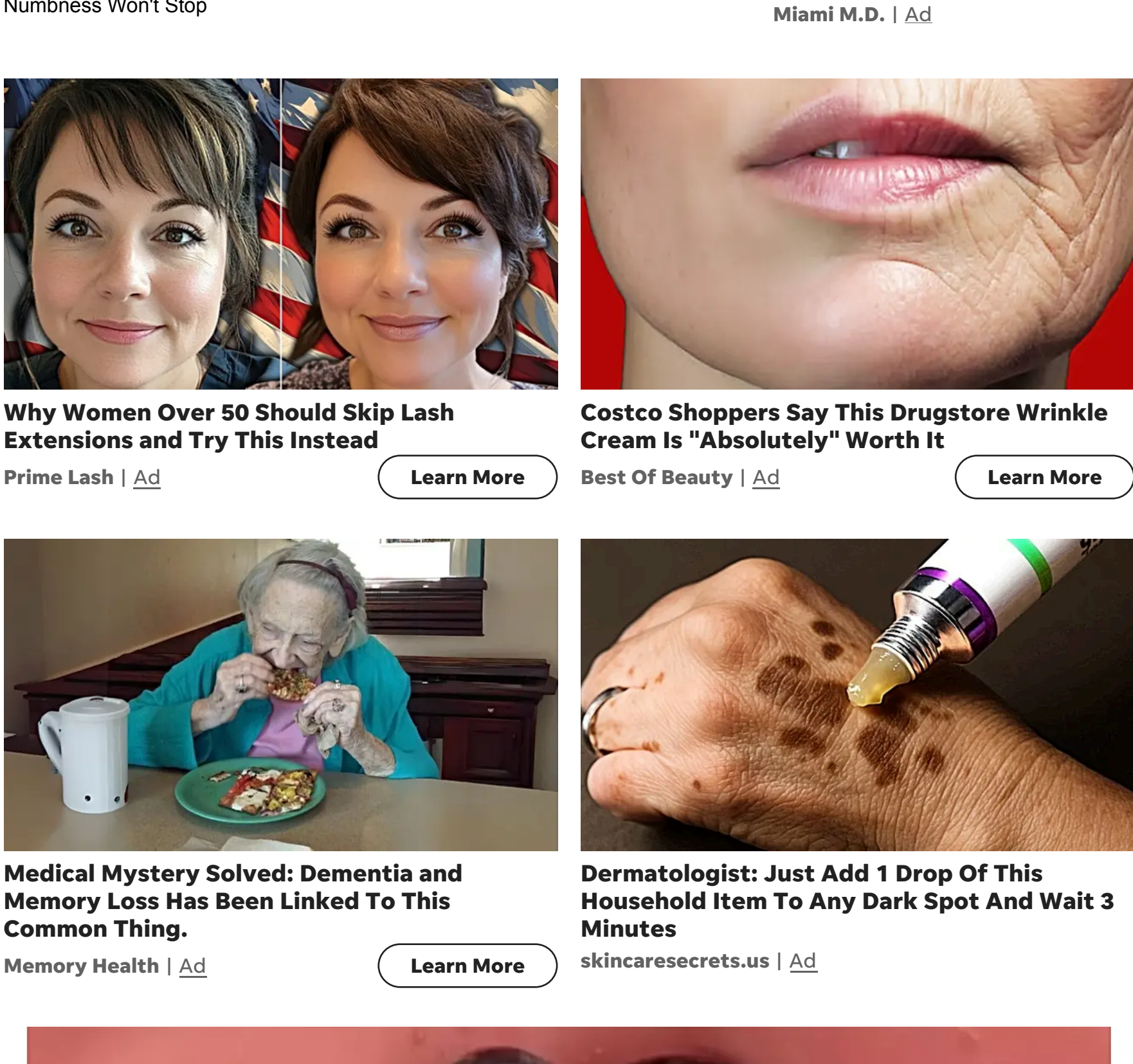
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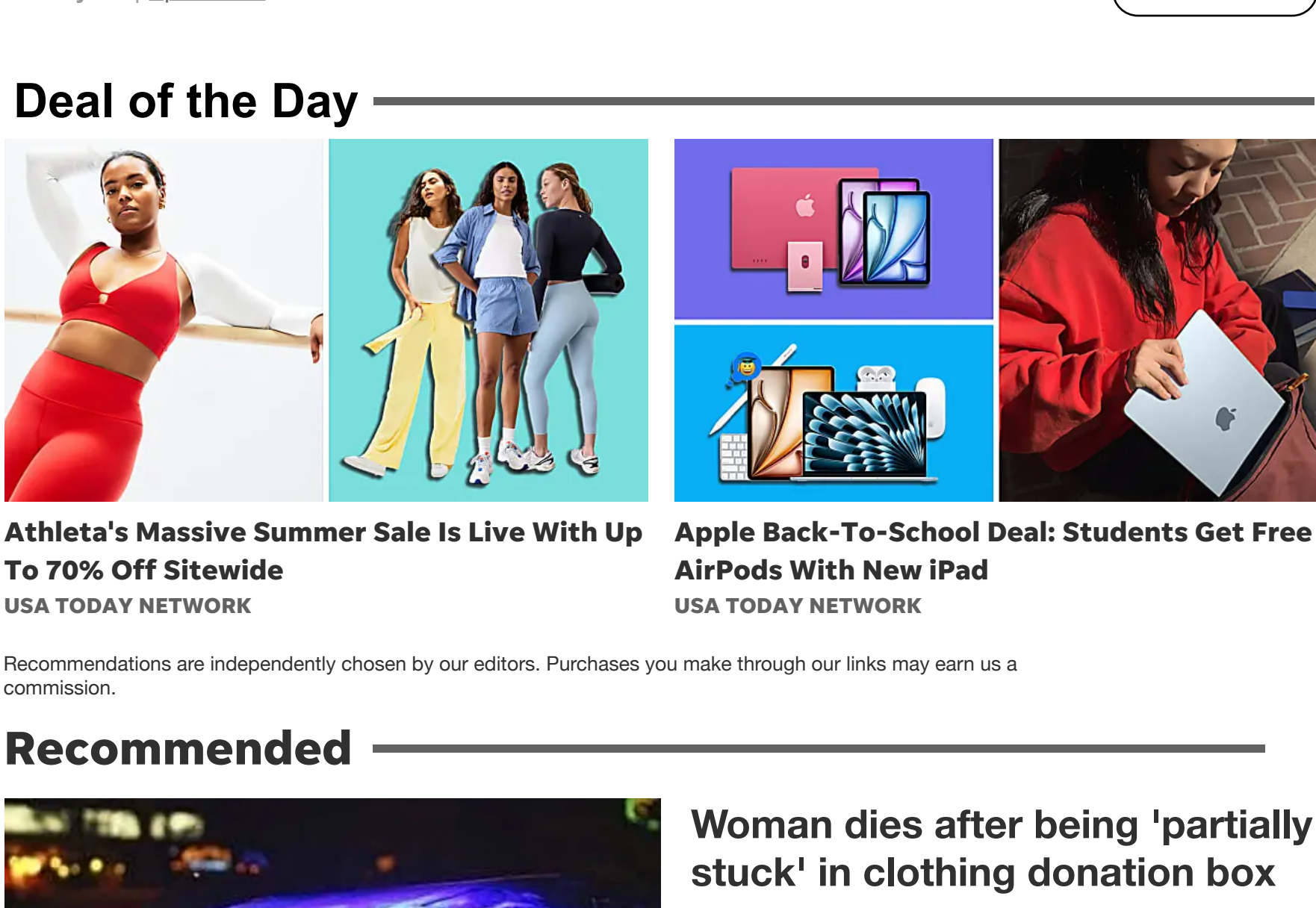
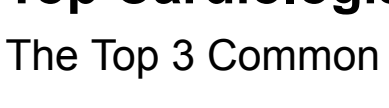
Physician associations have consistently opposed efforts to expand other providers' practice authority. A [common argument](#) is that nurse practitioners may not provide the same quality of care as physicians, resulting in more medical errors and harm to patients. But decades of data contradict these claims. Across a wide range of quality measures — including [opioid prescribing rates](#), [malpractice payouts](#) and [adverse action reports](#) — researchers have found no discernable evidence that expanding nurse practitioners' practice authority jeopardizes patient safety.

The same goes for other types of advanced practice nurses. For example, granting full practice authority to certified nurse-midwives [makes care more accessible](#) with [no sign of adverse consequences](#) for patients.



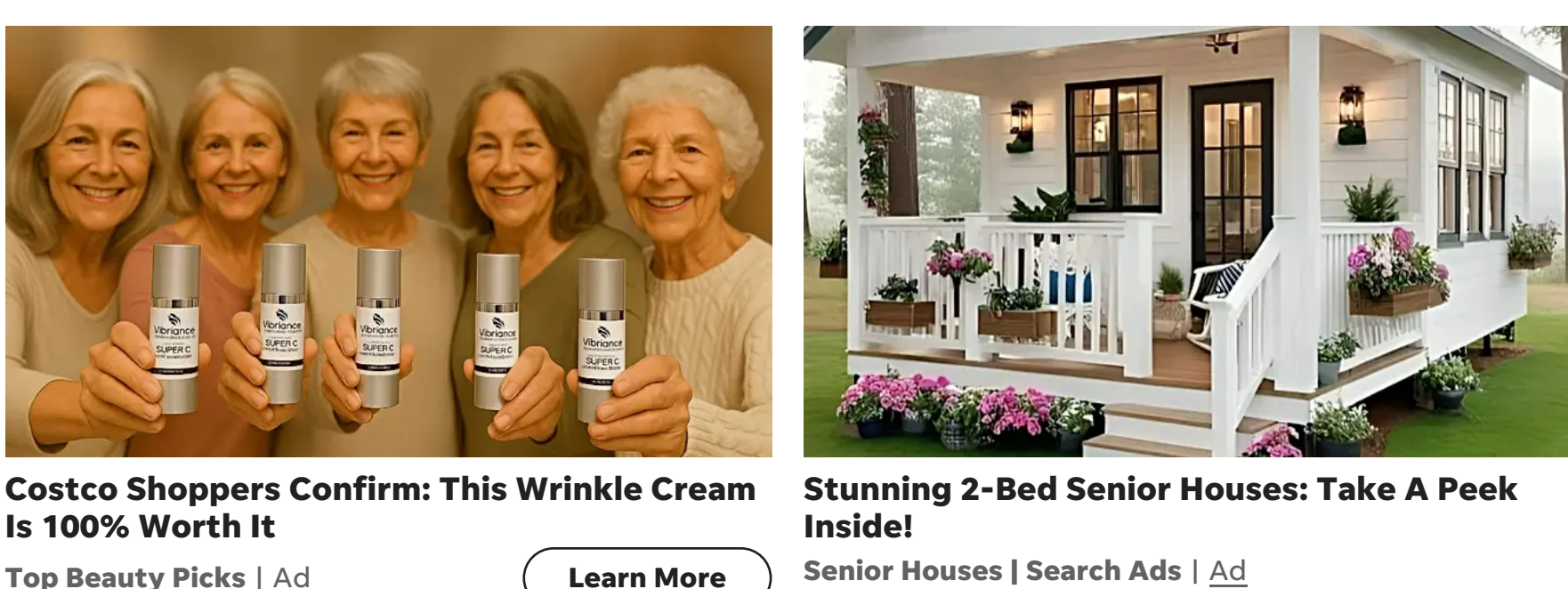
The evidence is clear. Independent-practice nurses provide high-quality care to millions of patients in the U.S. But too many states, like Texas, erect regulatory barriers that limit their effectiveness, depriving patients of accessible care. Allowing these providers to do the jobs they were trained to do isn't radical. It's common sense.

Liam Sigaud is a research analyst at the Knee Regulatory Research Center at West Virginia University.



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