

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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They said it

"What I think is within our swim lane reasonably, over a fairly short period of time, is to understand the impact of MA payments on SNFs because we're increasingly looking at a smaller and smaller piece of the nursing facility pie [for Fee for Service Medicare]"

Commissioner Scott Sarran, MD, after MedPAC recommended a 4% cut for nursing homes

"Medicare Advantage is a vital program that must serve patients' needs, not corporate profits" U.S. Attorney Craig Missakian for the Northern District of California, in announcing \$556 million MA fraud settlement with Kaiser Permanente

"You would think a major medical center would be a safe space. I'm holding off making the appointments, because I don't want to go into territory where ICE is operating" Minnesota Long COVID Patient Tina Ridler

Skyline's Joseph Schwartz Paroled in Arkansas

A nursing home owner who was pardoned by President Donald Trump has been paroled in Arkansas, three weeks after he was ordered to a state prison.

Joseph Schwartz had been ordered last month to prison to serve out his sentence on state Medicaid fraud and tax evasion charges.

Schwartz, of New York, was three months into a three-year federal sentence for tax fraud when Trump pardoned him in November.

Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin had filed a petition last month seeking that Schwartz serve out the rest of his state sentence.

News from the States, 01/15/2026

MedPAC Recommends a 4% Pay Cut for Nursing Homes

The Congressional advisory group MedPAC has recommended a 4% pay cut for skilled nursing providers next fiscal year, but members also renewed calls to look at payments outside of the traditional Medicare program when making future reimbursement decisions.

The MedPAC voted unanimously to support the recommendation cutting payments for Medicare patients, who accounted for a median 8% of all stays in about 14,400 facilities.

The cut could theoretically save up to \$5 billion in fiscal 2027 and up to \$25 billion over a decade.

McKnight's, 01/15/2026

Government Shutdown - CMS Reduces Survey Expectations

CMS is reducing pressure on state survey agencies to make up for time lost during a federal government shutdown last fall.

In a memo sent to state survey agencies, directors of the Quality, Safety & Oversight Group and Survey & Operations Group said it would reduce goals around some nursing home survey and certifications standards by about 20%.

That's roughly commensurate with the six-week shutdown, during which state surveyors were prohibited from conducting federally funded nursing home compliance work, except for in specific cases such as in response to immediate jeopardy allegations.

McKnight's, 01/15/2026

Man Killed by Feds In Minn. Was an RN

Federal agents shot and killed a registered nurse in Minneapolis on Saturday amid an immigration crackdown in the city.

The 37-year-old man was identified as Alex Pretti, an ICU nurse at the Veterans Administration.

Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said in a statement that federal officers were conducting an operation as part of the Trump

administration's immigration crackdown and fired "defensive shots" after a man with a handgun approached them and "violently resisted" when officers tried to disarm him.

Officials did not specify if Pretti brandished the gun, and it is not visible in bystander video of the shooting.

MedPage Today, 01/24/2026

NJ Suing 3 Nursing Homes For Ripping Off Medicaid

New Jersey has acted against three nursing homes for fraud, waste, and abuse.

The state filed a lawsuit against the owners of Hammonton and Deptford Centers to recover misspent Medicaid funds totaling \$124 million.

The state investigation found Daryl Hagler, and his friend, Kenneth Rozenberg, hid their profiteering and self-dealing, using complex real estate deals, excessive loans, inflated rents, and undisclosed fees paid to nine "related entities" – companies they or their relatives owned.

The state also issued a final notice to South Jersey Extended Care, currently in receivership, that Medicaid funding will cease on March 13.

NJ State Comptroller news release, 01/19/2026

Federal Bill Would Allow NPs, PAs to do Doc-like Work

Nurse practitioners, physician assistants and clinical nurse specialists in skilled nursing facilities would be allowed to perform clinical assessments under newly proposed federal legislation.

The Enhancing Skilled Nursing Facilities Act eliminates federal requirements that require a physician to perform those services. Advanced practice clinicians also would be able to supervise residents' care while in SNFs and other facilities plus make clinical decisions as the treating provider.

Current federal law allows NPs, PAs, or nurse specialists to perform and bill the government for required clinical assessments, but a physician must also perform the same assessment while submitting for reimbursement, duplicating payments for the same services.

McKnight's, 01/19/2026

IN THE TRENCHES - **COVID-19 & Other Outbreaks** **in the U.S. and the World**

AMERICA: The CDC confirmed 416 total US cases so far this month—an increase of 245 infections in the past week—and as US health officials downplay the burgeoning outbreak and the key role that vaccines play in preventing illness. Of the 416 cases that the CDC noted 86% are in children and young adults, 25% are in children younger than 5 years. Among all patients, 94% were unvaccinated or have an unknown vaccination status (**CIDRAP**).

OKLAHOMA: An indictment was unsealed charging Mark Loftis, 38, a chiropractor and medical supply company owner for his role in a \$30 million conspiracy to submit fraudulent claims to multiple federal health care programs for orthotic braces and other durable medical equipment (DME), and for the theft of government funds intended to support health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Loftis paid illegal kickbacks to marketers in exchange for the referral of Medicare patients, and to marketers and telemedicine companies in exchange for signed doctors' orders that could be used to support claims to health care benefit programs (**DOJ news release**).

AMERICA: A study examined associations between long COVID and 24 social risk factors (eg, food insecurity, poverty); caregiver marital status, discrimination; caregiver education access and quality; neighborhood and built environment; and health care access and quality. After adjusting for confounding factors, economic instability (including food insecurity) was tied to a more than double risk of long COVID but economic instability without food insecurity was not (**EurekAlert**).

NORTH CAROLINA: Driven by declining vaccine rates and growing vaccine hesitancy, the United States experienced its largest number of measles cases in decades in 2025, with 2242 cases. In North Carolina, seven cases have been confirmed since early December. Most are linked to a fast-spreading outbreak in Spartanburg, S.C., near the state border, where more than

430 cases have been reported (**NC Health News**).

AMERICA: A study of more than 25,000 adults suggests that people with a family history of cancer may face a higher risk of developing long COVID, even if they have never had cancer themselves. Led by researchers at Augusta University in Georgia, the researchers estimated that adults with a family history of cancer were 26% more likely to experience long COVID than those without a close relative with cancer (**Cancer Causes & Control**).

DELAWARE & GEORGIA: The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service noted several commercial poultry outbreaks of avian flu, including one in Delaware, involving 147,900 birds that were part of a commercial broiler operation. Georgia had the second-largest detection affecting 71,300 birds at a commercial broiler breeder facility (**CIDRAP**).

WASHINGTON, D.C.: A team from Children's National Hospital and George Washington University found that in utero SARS-CoV-2 exposure may predispose children to altered brain volumes, impaired cognition, and internalizing emotional problems such as anxiety and depression. The researchers enrolled 39 mother-baby pairs in Washington, DC, who had been exposed to COVID-19 during pregnancy from 2020 to 2022 and compared them with 103 normative pairs from before the pandemic (2016 to 2019). None of the infected women had been vaccinated (**Brain, Behavior, and Immunity**).

AMERICA: A large observational **study** using US healthcare claims and electronic health record data suggests that Moderna's updated 2024-25 COVID vaccine was 39% effective at preventing medically attended illness among adults and 53% effective against hospitalization, particularly those at high risk for severe disease. The study, led by scientists from the vaccine manufacturer analyzed outcomes among 596,248 adults who received the updated mRNA-1273 vaccine (**Infectious Diseases and Therapy**).

COLORADO & OREGON: Wastewater testing can alert public health officials to measles infections days to months before cases are confirmed by doctors, researchers said in two studies published by the CDC. Colorado health officials were able to get ahead of the highly contagious virus by tracking its presence in sewer systems. Oregon researchers found wastewater could have warned them of an outbreak more than two months before the first person tested positive (**AP**).

ATLANTA: The proportions of older US adults vaccinated against influenza in the previous year and those ever vaccinated against pneumonia were lower in 2024 than in 2019. The percentages of older adults who received a flu vaccine in 2023 and who ever were vaccinated against pneumonia were lower in 2024 (67.1% and 64.7%, respectively) than in 2019 (70.5% and 67.0% respectively (**CDC**)).

AMERICA: The CDC confirmed a *Salmonella* outbreak linked to a powdered greens supplement. So far at least 45 people in 21 states have been sickened. No deaths have been reported, but 12 people have been hospitalized. The CDC said people involved in the outbreak reported eating Live It Up Super Greens supplement powder in the weeks prior to illness onset. The company has issued a voluntary recall of the product (**CDC**).

SOUTH CAROLINA: The Department of Public Health (DPH) today confirmed 54 new measles cases in just three days, raising the size of its outbreak since October to 700 cases. The 700 South Carolina cases are all part of an Upstate outbreak centered in Spartanburg County, home to 668 (95%) of those infections (**CIDRAP**).

COVID-19, 01/22/2026

World Total Cases
779,060,919

World Total Deaths
7,108,587

U.S. Total Deaths
1,232,898

World Health Organization

Recent LSC Survey Protects Better Than Compliance

How recently a nursing home was last surveyed is a better predictor of emergency weather preparedness than safety regulation compliance alone.

That's a key finding from a retrospective study that evaluated timeliness and compliance with Life Safety Code provisions in 920 nursing homes housing 56,825 residents in Florida and the Carolinas in the path of Hurricane Ian.

Researchers said 43% of the 711 facilities that had been inspected were noncompliant with at least one life safety standard. About 12% of residents in those facilities experienced a greater risk of post-disaster hospitalization but not mortality.

Health Affairs Scholar, January 2026

W. Va. Committee Gets Low-Down on LTC

The West Virginia Senate Workforce Committee met during the week to discuss the state's evolving long-term care industry, including workforce challenges, shifts in patient demographics and Medicaid.

The state has 124 nursing homes with about 10,800 beds.

The Committee was told nursing homes are seeing the after-effect of the state's substance abuse problem - a shift from traditional elder care to younger patients with mental illness and substance use disorders.

The influx of those younger patients has further strained the state's hospitals, home health agencies, hospices and primary care providers.

West Virginia News, 01/19/2026

Finally! Judge Approves Sale Of Genesis Healthcare

A federal bankruptcy judge has approved the \$996 million sale of Genesis HealthCare and its nearly 300 subsidiaries to a newly formed investment group whose bid emerged as a surprise last week.

The ruling followed more than three hours of testimony — including objections from competing bidders.

Newcomer 101 West State Street was ultimately selected the winner of a second auction,

Genesis was once one of the nation's largest skilled nursing providers but had dwindled to 175 facilities. The effort to sell has been dogged by allegations of insider dealing.

McKnight's, 01/20/2026

Two Arrested for Allegedly Impersonating Nurse

Two women have been arrested and charged with running a dangerous scheme that defrauded the state's Medicaid program.

Prosecutors say the defendants resorted to identity theft to repeatedly impersonate a licensed nurse and administer treatment to patients.

Prosecutors say while running her staffing agency NurseSpan in West Hartford, Conn, Karen Wurst allegedly used the nursing identification number of a nurse without her permission to create false credentials for Suzean Langan

Langan represented herself as an LPN at 18 facilities even though she did not attend nursing school, was not trained and never acquired a nursing license.

WTIC-TV, 01/15/2026

Ransomware Attack Impact Upped to Almost 480K People

Covenant Health has updated the number of residents and patients in Maine and New Hampshire who were affected by a May 26 data breach, disclosing that almost 480,000 people were affected rather than the 7,864 reported in July.

The operator of skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities; independent living, assisted living and memory care communities; community-based health and elder care organizations; and hospitals provided the revised number in a Dec. 31 letter to those potentially affected.

Senior Living, 01/07/2026

ONE COLUMN

Vaccines Are Helping Seniors More Than We Knew

The primary reason to be vaccinated against shingles, RSV and influenza is that the shots provide protection against hospitalization and death.

But other reasons for older people to be vaccinated are emerging. They are known, in doctor-speak, as off-target benefits, meaning that the shots do good things beyond preventing the diseases they were designed to avert.

The CDC reported last week that about 31% of older adults had not yet received a flu shot. Only about 41% of adults 75 and older had ever been vaccinated against RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, and about a third of seniors had received the most recent covid-19 vaccine.

The CDC recommends the one-and-done pneumococcal vaccine for adults 50 and older. An analysis in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, however, estimated that from 2022, when new guidelines were issued, through 2024, only about 12% of those 67 to 74 received it, and about 8% of those 75 and older.

The strongest evidence for off-target benefits, dating back 25 years, shows reduced cardiovascular risk following flu shots.

Healthy older adults vaccinated against flu have substantially lower risks of hospitalization for heart failure as well as for pneumonia and other respiratory infections. Vaccination against influenza has also been associated with lower risks of heart attack and stroke.

Moreover, many of these studies predate the more potent flu vaccines now recommended for older adults.

Could the RSV vaccine, protective against another respiratory illness, have similar cardiovascular effects? A recent large Danish study of older adults found a nearly 10% decline in cardiorespiratory hospitalizations — involving the heart and lungs — among the vaccinated versus a control group, a significant decrease.

KFF Health News, 02/14/2026

Staffing and AI Are Concerns for 2026

A 2026 forecast from LTC consulting firm Health Dimensions Group (HDG) is concerned how others utilize the technology to save time and money and navigate the risk of data leaks. Understanding what information is being uploaded to databases.

As staffing challenges become the “new normal” for senior care facilities, the most successful ones will be those that embrace nimble strategic plans, give new hires and employees the “red carpet” treatment, and provide non-traditional benefits

However, HDG is optimistic about capital markets. federal interest rate cuts late last year could propel more new development for senior care facilities.

McKnight's, 01/15/2026

Another State to Regulate SNF Workplace Violence

OSHA has guidance on workplace violence prevention, but the rules are not mandatory.

Now New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) has signed into law a bill which singles out nursing homes and hospitals for new rules requiring assessment, prevention and reporting of safety threats or incidents.

At least 11 other states either have similar new requirements or are developing them.

McKnight's, 12/23/2025

NY Strike-Replacements Cost Hospitals a Bundle

New York City hospitals are paying as much as \$9,000 a week to nurses willing to cross picket lines, creating an expense for medical centers that further strains their struggling budgets.

The \$9,006 a week that Continuum Health Center is offering to pay travel nurses for pulling five 12-hour shifts is nearly three times the average salary that data from Indeed shows hospitals typically offer in the Big Apple.

The pay, which is on the higher end of what temporary nurses typically get, is a large slice of the millions of dollars major

hospitals are spending because of the strike.

Bloomberg, 01/15/2026

Senators Take Renewed Gander At UnitedHealth

Two US senators, Ron Wyden and Elizabeth Warren, told UnitedHealth CEO Stephen Hemsley they were renewing an inquiry begun in August after an update in *The Guardian* which accused the company of “padding its revenues at the expense of residents living in nursing homes.”

The *Guardian* reported UHG deployed incentive programs aimed at encouraging contracted nursing homes to keep I-SNP enrollee hospitalizations below a set threshold.

The reporting alleges that UHG seeks to reduce even necessary hospitalizations for I-SNP enrollees in order to avoid paying for the cost of medically necessary, and even lifesaving, care.”

UHG “categorically” denied the accusations.

McKnight's, 01/08/2026

Incentives Could Up Staffing & Lower Hospitalization

If the Feds incentivized higher staffing models in nursing homes there would be better patient health outcomes.

Researchers analyzed outcomes in Illinois since the state instituted a value-based payment system for nursing homes in 2022. It incentivized staffing improvements by providing facilities with bonus reimbursements up to \$38.68 per Medicaid resident-day based on acuity-adjusted staffing levels.

The payment reform translated into a 12.2% increase in nurse staffing and a 0.51 percentage point decrease in 90-day hospitalization rates.

The study authors estimate that if a similar reform were adopted nationally, there would be 6,142 fewer hospitalizations each year.

JAMA Health Forum, 12/16/2026

Briefly in the News

In a first for the U.S., Utah is letting artificial intelligence — not a doctor — renew certain medical prescriptions. No human involved. The state has launched a pilot program with health-tech startup Doctronic that allows an AI system to handle routine prescription renewals for patients with chronic conditions (*Politico*).

Clinical laboratory LTD Holding LLC, formerly known as Labtech Diagnostics LLC (Labtech), of Anderson, South Carolina, and its founder and CEO Joseph Labash, of the United Arab Emirates, have agreed to pay at least \$6.8 million to the United States to resolve False Claims Act allegations involving illegal kickbacks to doctors. With this settlement, the Department of Justice has secured over \$11.5 million in civil False Claims Act settlements relating to Labtech, including recoveries from nine doctors (*DOJ news release*).

About 84% of 691 health care providers in 30 states report significant or moderate decreases in patient visits since January 2025, when President Trump issued an executive order on immigration. In Minnesota where the recent focus has been, ICE raids are leading a growing number of people canceling important and even life-saving medical appointments (*CIDRAP*).

In the billion-dollar race to commercialize psychedelic medicine, psilocybin, a naturally occurring hallucinogen better known as magic mushrooms, or “shrooms,” has decisively pulled ahead of the pack. The FDA said it would move up its review of a psilocybin treatment for severe depression by nine to 12 months. Approval could come by the end of the year. The news is among the first concrete signs that the government is recognizing psychedelic medicine as a potential therapy tool (*The New York Times*).

New criteria for obesity are putting more Americans into that category. Researchers at Mass General Brigham have proposed a major update to how obesity is defined, which would classify nearly 70% of U.S. adults as obese (*Fox News*).