

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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They said it

"We are asking for fair pay, safe staffing ratios, safety from workplace violence and coverage from our insurance," Divya Viswanathan, an RN on strike against NYC hospitals

"I will ensure that Big Pharma and Big Insurance don't bribe medical providers to pressure parents to jab their kids with vaccines they feel aren't safe or necessary" Florida Attorney General Ken Paxton in announcing an investigation into doctors who, he says, receive financial incentives to vaccinate

You cannot make a return on investment if you don't have access to the US market" Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel announcing his company doesn't plan to invest in new late-stage vaccine trials

Agency Use Down but So Is SNF Staffing

While nursing homes added nearly 41,000 jobs last year, they still remain the only healthcare sector not to have fully recovered from pandemic-era worker losses.

Indeed, doctor's offices and outpatient care are both up 13.4%. Home health and hospitals have recovered 19% and 10.9% respectively.

While nursing home staffing has dropped 1.7% since COVID hit in 2020.

Some 90% of providers say staff recruitment remains difficult as the population of adults aged 80 or older is expected to increase by 8 million over the next decade.

Agency use has decreased 44% and now make up 5.6% of the LTC workforce.

AHCA, January 2026

Medicare Advantage Companies Take a Big Hit

The Trump administration plans to increase payments to next year's Medicare Advantage plans by less than 0.1% on average — far below what the industry had expected.

Several Wall Street analysts expected pay increases of 4%-6%, but a crucial measure of Medicare spending came in below consensus estimates.

The stock prices of the nation's largest Medicare Advantage insurers — UnitedHealth Group, Humana, and CVS Health — all fell by more than 9% in after-hours trading.

Business of Health Care Reporter, 01/26/2026

QIO: MA Nursing Home Denials Are Suspicious

Acentra Health, a Quality Improvement Organization serving 29 states, reviews 25,000 coverage appeals a month, the vast majority (83%) of them from skilled nursing patients.

Of those, a staggering 93% come from Medicare Advantage beneficiaries. That's despite the fact that MA market penetration sits just below 52%. By comparison, only 7% of appeals come from individuals in Fee for Service Medicare.

Acentra Chief Medical Officer Jessica Whitley, said during a webinar Wednesday that the "pretty big" difference indicates MA beneficiaries are "far more likely" to feel Notices of Medicare Non-Coverage, or NOMNCs, "are being issued before they are clinically ready."

McKnight's, 01/21/2026

CMS Paying More for Medicare Advantage Patients

CMS paid Medicare Advantage plans \$76 billion more in 2026 -- than if those same patients were enrolled in traditional fee-for-service Medicare.

That despite a 2024 CMS policy to limit MA plans' ability to exaggerate patients' health risks.

The finding was among those from a recent MedPAC status report on

Medicare plans. MedPAC advises CMS on Medicare policies.

The report attributed the difference in spending between MA and traditional Medicare to two factors: MA plans' "coding intensity," and "favorable selection," the tendency for healthier, less costly patients to enroll in MA plans rather than fee-for-service plans.

MedPage Today, 01/20/2026

As Admissions Decreased Waiting Lists Increased

Dutch LTC reform in 2015 helped promote aging-in-place to stabilize nursing home admissions but also increased nursing home waiting lists among older adults with dementia.

Admission rates for persons with dementia decreased but increased waiting lists. The authors said that indicated a need to balance policies promoting aging-in-place with adequate long-term care capacity, consistent with the American Geriatrics Society's Strategic Framework for a National Plan on Aging.

Results showed that since implementation of the Dutch 2015 LTC reform, admissions of older Dutch persons with dementia decreased by around 39%. But waiting lists immediately increased 28% then gradually to 35%.

Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, January 2026.

Low Medicaid Rates Undercut SNF Quality

New research demonstrates that higher daily Medicaid rates result in more staffing and higher 5-Star ratings, regardless of whether they're nonprofit or for-profit entities.

About 66% of SNF earning \$251 or more per Medicaid patient day, earned the highest 5-Star ratings. But among those in the lower two payment tiers, just 40% of providers did so.

Similar results were seen in staffing, where about 61% of the three best paid provider groups earned a 4- or 5-star rating vs. 24.5% of the others.

And in quality measures, about 82% earned top star ratings vs. 61% in the two lowest-paid groups.

McKnight's, 01/22/2026

IN THE TRENCHES -

COVID, Flu, Measles & Other Outbreaks Around the World

AMERICA: The chair of a federal vaccine advisory panel charted a new course for the committee in a podcast released recently — suggesting the public might want to reconsider the use of polio vaccines, arguing individual freedoms should be a north star of the panel, and pointing to the COVID pandemic as key to his thinking on health policy (*Stat*).

CALIFORNIA: Napa County reported its first measles case since 2012 — an unvaccinated child who had recently traveled to South Carolina, where a large outbreak has infected nearly 650 people. Napa County health officials said the case does not pose a health threat to the general population and that they are working to notify anyone who may have been exposed. A single case of measles can generally be contained if the vast majority of people in the community who are exposed to the person have been vaccinated (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

AMERICA: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children be vaccinated against 18 diseases, more than the U.S. government directs after it overhauled its schedule. The doctors group kept its guidance largely unchanged from its previous version from last year. The group said it doesn't endorse the CDC childhood-vaccine schedule, which now recommends all children get vaccinated against 11 diseases (*The Wall Street Journal*).

FLORIDA: On the heels of a measles outbreak in Texas that killed two unvaccinated children, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton says he has opened an investigation into pediatricians who vaccinate because, he claims, they receive illegal financial incentives to do so. "I launched an investigation into unlawful financial incentives related to childhood vaccine recommendations," he said in a news release (*CIDRAP*).

AFRICA: The southern African nation of Malawi began a cholera vaccination rollout this week in a bid to stem the threat of the disease that kills tens of thousands of people globally each year. The continent suffered a major setback in its battle against cholera last year when

cases surpassed 300,000, the worst toll in 25 years. Malawi hopes to roll out 24,000 of the oral vaccines as a start, though officials say many more are needed for the country (*AP*).

FLORIDA: With supporters pointing to diminished "public trust" in vaccines and the health care system, a Senate committee has approved a bill that would allow people injured by vaccines to sue drug manufacturers that advertise the products (*News Service of Florida*).

SWITZERLAND: Moderna's CEO said the company doesn't plan to invest in new late-stage vaccine trials because of growing opposition to immunizations from US officials. "in an interview from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Regulatory delays and lack of support from US health officials are making the potential market size "much smaller," he said (*Bloomberg*).

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AMERICA: Routine childhood vaccinations, nor the aluminum used as vaccine adjuvants, are not associated with an increased risk of epilepsy in young children, according to a new case-control study. The study, led by a team from the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute in Wisconsin, examined whether being up to date on recommended vaccines or having higher cumulative exposure to vaccine-related aluminum was linked to the development of epilepsy in children under age four (*The Journal of Pediatrics*)

SOUTH CAROLINA: The Department of Public Health has confirmed 54 new measles cases in just three days, raising the size of its outbreak, which DPH first reported in October, to 700 cases. The news comes as 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 (*CIDRAP*).

ATLANTA: Dr. William Foege, a leader of one of humanity's greatest public health victories — the global eradication of smallpox — has died. Foege died 01/24/2026 in Atlanta at the age of 89, The 6-foot-7 inch Foege literally stood out in the field of public health. A whip-smart medical doctor with a calm demeanor, he had a canny knack for beating back infectious disease (*Task Force for Global Health news release*).

AMERICA: Flu activity is starting to decline nationwide. The CDC estimated that there have been at least 19 million illnesses, 250,000 hospitalizations and 10,000 deaths from flu so far this season. Currently, seven states are seeing "very high" levels of flu-like illnesses while 23 states are seeing "high" levels, CDC data shows (*ABC News*).

AMERICA: Health officials found spores that can cause infant botulism at a supplier for formula-maker ByHeart Inc. as part of the investigation into an outbreak that sickened dozens of babies in the US. FDA testing identified the spores in a whole milk powder at a ByHeart supplier. The supplier wasn't named. The CDC said the tests also found links between samples from one of the infants involved in the outbreak and the whole milk powder (*Bloomberg*).

NORTH CAROLINA: The FDA is updating a nationwide chocolate recall to include several additional flavors potentially contaminated with Salmonella. N.C. chocolate maker Spring & Mulberry issued a voluntary recall earlier this month for Salmonella risks associated with its Mint Leaf chocolate. Now, the recall has been expanded to include Earl Grey, Lavender Rose, Mango Chili, Mixed Berry, Blueberry Fennel, Pecan Date and Pure Dark Minis. (*MassLive.com*).

COVID-19, 01/29/2026

World Total Cases
779,073,807

World Total Deaths
7,109,103

U.S. Total Deaths
1,233,343

World Health Organization

Study Finds Seniors Should Be Vaccinated Twice a Year

A study analyzed post-vaccination serum from samples from 697 nursing home residents (NHR) and 127 healthcare workers across Northeast Ohio and Rhode Island.

Results indicate that NHRs antibody levels diminish significantly from 2 weeks to 12 months post-vaccination. Residents who have had COVID show higher peak antibodies and slower diminishing. Antibody levels after vaccination for those who have never had COVID lagged health care workers and residents with prior infection then decayed at a similar rate.

The findings support the CDC recommendation of a bi-annual vaccination to reduce severe COVID-19 outcomes in persons age 65 and older.

PubMed, 01/24/2026

Providers Attempt to Protect Haitian SNF Workers

LeadingAge and its members participated in two events focused on the impending February 3 termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haiti, highlighting the consequences for aging services providers and the older adults they serve.

At both events advocates aimed to underscore how the Trump administration's policy decision to de-document Haitian TPS holders will exacerbate workforce shortages – jeopardizing the wellbeing of older adults nationwide by limiting access to care and threatening providers' continuity of operations.

Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Sen. Ed Markey convened a **congressional field hearing** to examine the humanitarian, economic, and community consequences of ending TPS for Haiti.

LeadingAge news release, 01/24/2026

Families Seeking Answers From Chicago LTC Owner

Families whose loved ones were injured or died in Chicago area nursing homes are demanding accountability.

They said that a wealthy nursing care owner refuses to pay court-ordered verdicts and settlements tied to neglect.

The families held pictures of their loved ones, accusing owner Moishe Gubin of dodging millions of dollars in legal obligations. Gubin oversees more than 140 nursing homes nationwide.

They allege Gubin underinsures facilities to avoid payouts. Families are now urging lawmakers to step in and close what they call dangerous loopholes in state law.

CBS Chicago, 01/20/2026

Health Care Hiring Boom Losing Steam

The health care job growth that's powered the labor market since the COVID pandemic is stalling out.

Republican cuts to federal health programs, AI automation and rising costs are making health systems and other employers level off hiring — including for jobs requiring a professional license like nurses or physical therapists.

Health care employment grew last year by an average of 34,000 jobs a month - last year, increasing by an average of 34,000 jobs per month. But that's less than health care's monthly average increase of 56,000 roles in 2024.

Axios, 01/26/2026

Virginia Pursues Its Own Nursing Home Staffing Rule

Now that the feds have cancelled the staffing mandate, a Virginia lawmaker is attempting to impose a minimum standard there.

Del. Rodney Willett (D) introduced a bill calling for at least 3.25 hours of nurse staffing per resident day, an increase over the 3.08 standard that passed in 2023.

Willet told local media last week that Virginia is behind others when it comes to establishing a ratio.

With consumer advocates predicting CMS has no future interest in "ensuring adequate staffing," they're instead likely to try to influence more rigorous nursing standards in 35 states that already have them.

McKnight's, 01/24/2026

ONE COLUMN

Donations & Influence LTC Takes on NY Times

Providers pushed back after *The New York Times* took aim at the sector's advocacy efforts in the months before the federal nursing home staffing rule was repealed.

In a 2500-word article, the newspaper highlighted sector executives' insider meetings and millions of dollars in political contributions.

Despite the firestorm the article sparked among consumer groups the *Times* acknowledged it could provide "no evidence" linking lobbying activities and the repeal announced on Dec. 2; the outlet also reported that the 2024 staffing rule had been under reconsideration for months before then.

Nursing home leaders' Political Action Committee donations and most in-person activities that the *Times* reported on began in August, the month after President Trump signed a massive tax bill that included a lengthy moratorium on the staffing mandate.

The article highlights a list of donations from industry stakeholders totaling about \$4.8 million, describes a private golf course meeting with the president and hints at possible influence exerted by HHS.

But sector advocates stressed that the story paid little attention to the legal arguments that led to the rule's defeat in two separate federal courts. Nor did it emphasize the bipartisan support in Congress for a significant delay of the rule, given the lack of available frontline staff in many parts of the US.

The American Health Care Association, whose leadership was targeted by the *Times* along with executives at high-profile skilled nursing companies struck back

"Like any other non-partisan advocacy organization, AHCA has a long history of engaging with presidents and lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to help educate policymakers and collaborate on issues that impact our residents and caregivers," said spokeswoman Rachel Reeves.

McKnight's, 01/27/2026

QM for Advance Care Planning DOA, for Now

In December, CMS said it was considering adopting an advance care planning measure to help assess quality in nursing homes and other post-acute and long-term care settings.

It would have measured the percentage of adult patients with an advance care planning discussion and decision documented in an electronic health record.

It could have affected both the Value-Based Purchasing and Quality Reporting programs for skilled nursing.

The measure had been scheduled for a vote by a post-acute review committee on Jan. 14, but officials quietly removed it from consideration.

CMS could recalibrate and reconsider it in future measurement cycles.

McKnight's, 01/21/2026

Reduced SNF Capacity May Limit Access to LTC

Likely due to staffing shortages, US nursing-home capacity has declined—by 15% or more in some cases—since the COVID-19 pandemic began, potentially narrowing access to long-term care and complicating hospital releases.

A team led by University of Rochester, New York, researchers used the 2018–2024 CMS Payroll-Based Journal to measure changes in skilled nursing facility (SNF) capacity since 2020.

The number of licensed SNF beds fell 2.5%, and operating capacity dropped 5.0%, from 2019 to 2024. In total, 25% saw capacity reductions of 15.1% or more, with the largest declines occurring in rural counties.

JAMA Internal Medicine, 01/22/2026

Bill Would Loosen In-House CNAs Training

Ron Estes (R-Kan.) and Rep. Josh Harder (D-Calif.) reintroduced the Ensuring Seniors' Access to Quality Care Act.

This bill allows nursing homes to continue operating their in-house CNA training program even if they incur fines above a

certain amount, so long as the fines are issued for reasons unrelated to direct resident care.

Current surveys show about 94–96% of nursing facilities are still actively hiring or struggling to fill roles, and rural areas have reported having to limit admissions to their facilities close to 50% their full capacity due to these challenges.

Rep. Ron Estes news release, 01/21/2026

DOJ Charges Mg't Group & Doc with False Claims

The Department of Justice has filed complaints against Priority Hospital Group (PHG), a Louisiana-based hospital management company, three PHG-managed long term care hospitals, and a doctor, alleging False Claims Act violations based on medically unnecessary care and patient referrals.

DOJ said PHG and the LTCH defendants allegedly held patients in the hospital longer than medically necessary to increase their Medicare reimbursement.

The complaint also alleges that one LTCH, Riverside Hospital of Louisiana, entered into agreements with a doctor, and provided him other remuneration, to induce him to refer patients to Riverside in violation of the Anti-Kickback Statute and Stark Law.

DOJ news release, 01/16/2026

Controversial U.S. Funded African Hep B Study Paused

Public-health authorities in Guinea-Bissau say they have suspended a controversial US-funded 1.6 million hepatitis B vaccine study that has raised questions about ethics and who has authority over clinical research conducted in Africa conducted by research teams from other countries.

This study was criticized because the intention was to vaccinate only half of 14,000 babies.

Nearly one in five people in Guinea-Bissau has chronic hepatitis B, a virus that targets the liver. About 90% of babies exposed at birth develop a chronic infection; 25% of these children go on to die of hepatitis B-related liver cancer or liver failure.

Nature, 01/23/2026

Briefly in the News

The EEOC has rescinded its Harassment Guidance which was originally approved in 2024. “Rescinding this guidance does not give employers license to engage in unlawful harassment,” said EEOC Chair Andrea Lucas. “Federal employment laws against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, and Supreme Court precedent interpreting those laws, remain firmly in place (EEOC news release).

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) announced just one day after the U.S. officially withdrew from the World Health Organization (WHO) that his state would become the first to join the organization’s Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, in a seeming rebuke of the Trump administration’s withdrawal from international collaborations (The Hill).

An experimental drug custom-made to target the genetic mutations of individual tumors showed promise in treating aggressive skin cancer. The personalized cancer drug is based on the same technology as the leading coronavirus vaccines that helped end the pandemic: sending instructions to the immune system using doses of messenger RNA (The Washington Post).

The Department of Veterans Affairs unveiled a massive plan for expanding its community care network with the purchase of \$1 trillion in private health services over the next decade. At a contentious hearing of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the VA’s chief financial officer detailed a proposal for restructuring community health care as a nationwide network of providers (Stars and Stripes).

The FDA is warning consumers that previously recalled canned tuna was recently shipped to retail stores in several states. The FDA a third-party distributor “inadvertently” shipped quarantined canned tuna that Tri-Union Seafoods cans with defective pull tab lids could leak or be contaminated with clostridium botulinum, “a potentially fatal form of food poisoning” (The Hill).

“A promise made is a debt unpaid”
Poet Robert Service from “The Cremation of Sam McGee”

