

# IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals  
in 100 Words-or-Less

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## **They said it**

*"At this time, the AAP no longer endorses the recommended childhood and adolescent immunization schedule from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention"* Sean O'Leary, MD, MPH, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Infectious Diseases

*[AARP] "believes repealing these standards allows facilities with ongoing staffing shortages to keep taking in new residents—even when they do not have enough workers to provide safe, competent care—and still bill taxpayers at full cost"* From letter to CMS' Dr. Oz seeking to re-establish Biden Administration staffing rule

*"... with an increasing number of retiring nurses, the continued ripple effects of the pandemic, and continued high demand for skilled nursing professionals, [is] approaching a critical tipping point"* Congressman Don Beyer (D-VA) on his bill to increase visa for foreign nurses

## **Bankruptcies? Senior Living, Hospitals Up, All Others Down**

Bankruptcy filings in the senior living sector increased 18% year over year in 2025, making the sector the only one in healthcare other than hospitals to see an increase.

In a report from Gibbins Advisors senior living saw more bankruptcies than hospitals in 2025 — 13 versus eight in hospitals.

Aside from senior living and care and hospitals, where bankruptcies increased 60% (going from five in 2024 to eight in 2025).

*Senior Living, 01/29/2026*

## **CMS: Falls More Vital Than Staffing for SFFs**

In a memo to state survey directors, CMS said it was asking states to begin considering falls rather than staffing in addition to survey scores for Special Focus Facilities - partly in response to watchdog calls for better scrutiny of falls prevention and reporting.

Compliance experts reacted to the changes with surprise, with one calling the updates to the selection criteria "huge in many ways.

The change is a major departure from CMS, which had increasingly aligned staffing metrics - more readily available with the advent and expansion of Payroll Based Journal reporting - with quality measurement and enforcement priorities.

*CMS Memo, 01/28/2026*

## **Oklahoma Takes a Shot at Policing Medicare Advantage**

A new Oklahoma executive order on Medicare Advantage may go further than any other state initiative to rein in practices largely seen as unfavorable to both beneficiaries and providers.

Nursing home operators are among those anxiously awaiting details on how Oklahoma regulators might enforce proposals to speed up claims payment, limit prior authorizations and in some cases, enable higher payment from the federal program.

Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) issued the executive order laying out 11 state-level rules for Medicare Advantage plans. At least four of them would address issues raised by nursing homes as major problems with the program's efficiency.

*McKnight's 01/29/2026*

## **CMS Wants Your Ideas to Purchase Made-in-the-USA**

CMS has issued an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) seeking public feedback strengthening the American-made supply chain for PPE and essential medicines.

Building on lessons learned during the COVID-19 public health emergency, the agency is exploring ways to reduce

reliance on foreign-made medical supplies.

The ANPRM seeks comments on new avenues the agency may consider to promote domestic purchasing by hospitals that participate in the Medicare program, including the potential creation of a new "Secure American Medical Supplies" designation for hospitals committed to American-made purchasing, and streamlined payment approaches to help offset the resource costs of domestic procurement.

*CMS news release, 01/26/2026*

## **NTSB Focuses on Utility Crew In Deadly SNF Explosion**

The federal agency investigating a fatal nursing home explosion just before Christmas has narrowed in on the actions of an on-site inexperienced repair crew from the local utility in its preliminary report.

The NTSB raised questions about the local utility's personnel training and operator qualifications, as well as its procedures related to natural gas odor-complaint responses.

The NTSB report was concise but offered the best timeline yet of the events before and after the Dec. 23 explosion at Bristol Health and Rehab Center outside of Philadelphia.

A nurse and two residents died in the blast.

*McKnight's, 01/26/2026*

## **Six Years Hard Time For Fake Nurse**

A woman who stole identities to work as a nurse in multiple states has been sentenced six years in federal prison.

U.S. Attorney Tim VerHey said it was a "happy accident" that Leticia Gallarzo didn't harm anyone.

Gallarzo pleaded guilty in 2023 to identity theft after she was accused of creating a false nurse's license and other credentials to work at a Michigan nursing home.

She also worked as a nurse in Chicago, Texas and California where she was working as a nurse when she was caught.

*AP 01/28/2026*

## **IN THE TRENCHES –**

### **Vaccines, COVID, Flu, Measles & Other Outbreaks Around the World**

**AMERICA:** After three weeks of declining cases, influenza levels rose last week and remain elevated across the U.S., Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19 activity is high in certain parts of the country. Overall levels of acute respiratory illness are low to moderate in most of the country, with only Alabama and Arkansas in the high category. COVID-19 cases are unchanged for much of the country, with levels growing or likely growing in 11 states. Flu cases are trending upward in 13 states, as are RSV cases in 21 states (*CDC FluView*).

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Multiple individuals at Archbishop Riordan High School – a private school – in San Francisco have tested positive for active tuberculosis. The San Francisco Department of Public Health is investigating an active outbreak of tuberculosis at a local high school that has sickened at least three individuals (*SFGATE*).

**AMERICA:** The American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) immunization schedule for 2026 continues to recommend routine immunization for protection against 18 diseases. However, it notably differ from the CDC's list of recommended vaccines, which was dramatically downsized in January. "We're going to publish vaccine recommendations that are based on scientific evidence and that are in the best interest of children," AAP said in a policy statement (*Pediatrics*).

**NEW YORK CITY:** Seventeen people have died outside in New York City since Jan. 19, as the region experiences an unusually long stretch of ultra-cold temperatures. At least 13 of the deaths were likely caused by hypothermia, Mayor Zohran Mamdani said. Three fatalities appear to be overdoses while the cause of one is unknown (*Bloomberg*).

**WASHINGTON, D.C:** The Trump administration is asking Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to phase out the use of vaccines containing the preservative thimerosal if it wants future US funding. Thimerosal is a

mercury-containing preservative that's been used in small amounts in some multidose vaccine vials since the 1930s to prevent microbial contamination. Although the preservative is no longer used in any routinely used US vaccines, it is used in some multidose vaccines in other countries (*CIDRAP*).

**FLORIDA:** three cases of measles have been documented this year, including two from the Tampa Bay area. According to local news, health officials say measles cases were confirmed in Hillsborough, Manatee, and St. Johns counties, and all case-patients are between ages 20 and 24 years. The patient in Manatee County likely acquired the virus outside of the country, but the other two people have no history of international travel (*Stat*).

**CAPITOL HILL:** Four Senate Democrats are pushing US Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to detail his plans for revamping how the federal government compensates people who are harmed by vaccines, as well as how he, his family and associates will benefit from the change. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey of Massachusetts, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland sent Kennedy a letter highlighting his ties to a law firm that represents people suing the pharmaceutical company Merck & Co (*Bloomberg*).

**FRANCE:** drug company Sanofi announced it has discontinued development of its next-generation seasonal flu vaccine based on mRNA technology but will continue to pursue a pandemic flu vaccine. Sanofi reported in its 2025 earnings documents that it was discontinuing its mRNA flu vaccine phase 1 trial, saying it has "deprioritized" its mRNA-based seasonal flu vaccine program and does not anticipate launching an mRNA-based seasonal flu product anytime (*Fierce Biotech*).

**THE WORLD:** Nearly four in 10 cancer cases diagnosed around the world in 2022 can be traced back to risks people and societies have the power to change, according to a sweeping new global study. The analysis, published in *Nature Medicine*, examined 36 cancer types across 185 countries and linked today's cancer diagnoses to how common certain

risk factors were about a decade earlier. The time lag reflected the reality that cancers often take years to develop after exposure (*Newsweek*).

**AMERICA:** Federal health officials are investigating a salmonella outbreak linked to two superfood supplements that sickened 65 people across 28 states. The FDA and CDC said the illnesses have been tied to products sold under the Live It Up and Why Not Natural brands. The supplements were sold on the companies' websites as well as on Amazon, eBay and Walmart (*The Hill*).

**CHICAGO:** In the last two weeks, Chicago has had two deaths and at least seven cases of meningococcal disease in adults. The Chicago Department of Public Health said it's a higher number of cases of this dangerous illness than usual for such a short time span (*Chicago Tribune*).

**CALIFORNIA:** A cluster of new measles cases reported across California has been linked to a visit to Disneyland late last month, with public health officials warning that thousands of people may have been exposed. Four measles cases have been reported in California in the past five days, and three of the infected people visited Disneyland around Jan. 28, according to a notice issued by Plumas County Public Health (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

**NEW YORK CITY:** Two weeks after the Trump administration formally withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization, the New York City Health Department joined a W.H.O. network aimed at countering new pathogens and emerging outbreaks (*New York Times*).

**THE WORLD:** Preventive cholera vaccination programs will restart globally after they were halted for nearly four years due to a vaccine shortage. Stocks of oral cholera vaccines in the global stockpile improved to nearly 70 million doses last year (*AP*).

#### **COVID-19, 02/05/2026**

**World Total Cases**  
779,088,505

**World Total Deaths**  
7,109,677

**U.S. Total Deaths**  
1,233,841

World Health Organization

## **Pandemic's Hidden Toll: Conditions Undiagnosed**

In England, visits to family doctors and hospital admissions for non-COVID reasons fell by a third in the early months of the pandemic.

New diagnoses of asthma fell by over 30% in the first year of the pandemic, while diagnoses of COPD dropped by more than half.

Diagnosis for depression in England have fallen since 2022.

New diagnoses of osteoporosis fell by a third early on and did not return to expected levels for almost three years. As a result, more than 50,000 fewer people than expected were diagnosed with osteoporosis in England between March 2020 and November 2024.

*BMJ, January 2026*

## **Better Roomie Selection Could Cut Mortality in SNFs**

Being more strategic about roommate assignments could lower 90-day mortality rates in nursing homes by more than 5% without necessarily increasing costs.

But the rub lies in the fact that what's good for patients with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias (ADRD) – support and informal monitoring from a cognitively healthy person sharing the same space – might not be helpful for patients without such diagnoses.

But by accounting for both sets of patient characteristics, the researchers said providers could adopt room assignment rules that would reduce overall mortality rates by 0.8 percentage points, or 5.2%, without additional staff or facility modifications.

*McKnight's, 01/07/2026*

## **Florida Lawmakers Advance Far-Reaching Health Bill**

A Florida House committee has backed a wide-ranging plan that seeks to trim health care regulations and carry out federal changes in programs such as food assistance and Medicaid.

The bill includes regulatory changes such as eliminating the state's long-debated

"certificate of need" process, which restricts the addition of nursing homes, hospice providers and intermediate care facilities for people with developmental disabilities.

The measure would eliminate restrictions on advanced practice RNs practicing autonomously, allow dental hygienists to have greater authority to treat patients and remove a cap on the number of physician assistants that each doctor can supervise.

*News Service of Florida, 01/30/2026*

## **States Will Need New Avenues to Finance Medicaid**

States will have to find new ways to pay for Medicaid under a regulation the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issued last week.

The agency finalized a proposal to crack down on the provider taxes states assess on hospitals, Medicaid insurers and others to help finance their share of Medicaid spending.

The final rule also implements related provisions from the tax law President Donald Trump enacted last July. These taxes generate \$24 billion a year for states, according to CMS.

*Modern Healthcare, 01/30/2026*

## **Wis. Healthcare Network Partners with PointClickCare**

The Wisconsin Statewide Health Information Network (WISHIN) has entered into a strategic partnership with PointClickCare (PCC) to improve the continuity of care for Wisconsin's long-term care and post-acute patients (LTPAC) as they transition between acute and post-acute facilities.

The collaboration enables care teams to coordinate healthcare for shared patients moving between acute and post-acute facilities.

The alliance is designed to enable secure, seamless healthcare data exchange among more than 2,000 care sites.

WISHIN will make available Admission, Discharge, Transfer (ADT) data to inform PointClickCare services and PointClickCare will share the post-acute facility to be integrated into a patient's medical record.

*WISHIN news release, 10/26/2026*

## **ONE COLUMN** **Courts Again Uphold Provider's COVID Immunity**

Separate courts have rejected two new attempts to undermine immunity protections granted elected officials or skilled nursing providers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such shield laws have continued to face tests — some successful — since the end of the public health law, leaving providers uncertain whether they'll hold in the long run.

In the first new case, a three-judge panel of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday ruled that former New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D) and Health Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli's decision to require nursing homes to admit COVID-positive patients was covered by qualified immunity for leaders acting in an official capacity.

While the judges sympathized with three women whose parents died in the pandemic's early months, they noted that state officials' immunity is not meant to be second-guessed by judges years after a decision must be made.

The doctrine of qualified immunity is meant to "give government officials breathing room to make reasonable but mistaken judgments about open legal questions," wrote Judge Thomas Ambro, citing case law. "Therefore, 'officials do not get stripped of qualified immunity every time a judge, with the clarity afforded by hindsight, believes that an official has committed a wrong.'"

In the other case the Iowa Supreme Court found the estate of a man who died in 2020 failed to establish that Oakland Manor acted with "reckless or willful misconduct," the only reasons cases allowed to proceed under broad liability immunity provisions adopted by the state legislature.

Iowa law protected providers from liability claims related to COVID-19-related injuries or death, in most circumstances. Many states passed such acts to encourage healthcare providers to continue caring for patients sick with the virus, especially before its infectious nature was well understood or before vaccines were available.

*McKnight's, 01/26/2026*

## **Yogi Said It Best 'It Aint Over 'Til It's Over'**

A federal judge declined to allow the nation's top federal bankruptcy overseer to intervene in the Genesis HealthCare sale, despite new allegations that an executive with the nursing home chain had tried to influence a second auction.

Bankruptcy Judge Stacey Jernigan denied the motion by the US Trustee's Office to appoint its own official and wrest control of the bankruptcy process from Genesis' management and its selected restructuring team.

Trustee appointment would amount to a default on the loans Genesis received to stay in business during the bankruptcy process, which could trigger immediate repayments or asset seizures by the lenders

The trustee has been a party to the case since Genesis, an operator of 175 nursing homes, filed for bankruptcy protection in July.

McKnight's, 01/29/2026

## **Kaiser Permanente to Pay \$556 Million for Fraud**

In the largest Medicare Advantage fraud settlement to date, Kaiser Permanente has agreed to pay \$556 million to settle Justice Department allegations that it billed the government for medical conditions patients didn't have.

The settlement resolves whistleblower lawsuits that accused the giant health insurer of mounting a years-long scheme in which it overstated how sick patients were to illegally boost revenues.

The Justice Department argued the health plan pressured doctors to add diagnoses "regardless of whether these conditions were actually considered or addressed.

KFF Healthcare, 01/15/2026

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WISHIN news release, 10/26/2026

## **Michigan Looks to Expand Who Can 'Doctor'**

Faced with severe shortages of doctors, dentists and other health care professionals, Michigan is considering filling the gap by expanding some roles.

For example, allowing nurse practitioners to prescribe and dispense controlled substances without a doctor's authority.

Granting temporary licenses allowing certain doctors who earned their degrees outside the US or Canada to practice in Michigan.

Joining interstate compacts, which would allow providers licensed in other states to practice in the state

Michigan is also expanding the use of other health care professionals like dental therapists to care for patients in areas lacking in dentists.

Bridge Michigan, 01/30/2026

## **Candida auris Spreading in Mo. Health Care Facilities**

Missouri officials say they continue to detect cases of the drug-resistant fungus *Candida auris* in health care facilities. The state's first identified *Candida auris* infection in October 2023. Since then, cases have expanded across nearly every type of health care setting.

Between July 2024 and December 2025, 757 cases were identified. Since 2023, Missouri has reported a total of 829 cases.

WDAF-TV, 01/29/2026

## **Briefly in the News**

California Gov. Gavin Newsom's office is demanding a civil rights investigation of Dr. Mehmet Oz, saying he discriminated against Armenians in a video claiming hospice fraud in Los Angeles, the latest front in the state's ongoing battle with the Trump administration. The Democratic governor's complaint, filed Thursday, came after Oz posted a video on social media in front of an Armenian bakery in Los Angeles, alleging that roughly \$3.5 billion in hospice and home care fraud has taken place in the city and "quite a bit of it" was run by "the Russian Armenian mafia" (**Ap**).

Two natural experiments in Canada suggest that herpes zoster (shingles or varicella zoster) vaccination averts or delays dementia diagnoses. The analysis was led by Stanford University researchers. The team estimated the effect of live attenuated shingles vaccination on new-onset dementia in 232,124 Canadians aged 70 years and older based on a natural experiment in Ontario (**The Lancet Neurology**).

Colorectal cancer is now the leading cause of cancer deaths among people younger than 50 in the U.S. Colorectal cancer death rates in that age group climbed by 1% every year since 2005. By contrast, cancer death rates in people younger than 50 have dropped by 44% since 1990 (Journal of the American Medical Association).

PACS Group, a holding company, announced that independently operated subsidiaries of the Company have acquired the operations of three post-acute care facilities, two located in Alaska and one in Idaho, with a total of 230 beds. The facilities are located in the Kenai Peninsula region of Alaska and the Boise metropolitan area in Idaho. PACS independent subsidiaries operate 324 post-acute care facilities across 17 states serving over 31,000 residents (**Business Wire**).

The Department of Justice saw more than \$6.8 billion in settlements and judgments under the False Claims Act in fiscal year 2025. A big part of that amount was the \$949 million judgment, including treble damages and penalties, against long-term care pharmacy Omnicare (**DOJ news release**).