

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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They said it

"In South Florida, there are 20 times more DME providers than McDonald's" CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz, MD, MBA, highlighting the agency's intensified focus on eliminating healthcare fraud.

Rising obesity rates undermine operational effectiveness, limit deployable manpower, and create vulnerabilities in our national defense posture" Brigadier General Allyson Solomon, MD ANG (Ret.) on an obesity epidemic in the U.S. military

"The wars over COVID, science, and vaccines have left the country without a trusted national voice on vaccines" KFF President and CEO Drew Altman, PhD

40% of SNF Leaders Plan to Buy – PE Top Buyer

The nursing home industry may see more of a buyer's market in 2026, but despite transaction optimism, staffing remains the dominant challenge, with recruitment, retention, labor costs and inflation topping concerns.

Most leaders and stakeholders in the sector don't see meaningful staffing improvements until late 2026 or beyond.

Technology, especially AI, will be critical in improving care coordination and supporting staff decision-making.

It appears to be a buyers' market, with 39.5% planning on purchasing assets in 2026, while 12.2% expecting to sell.

Interestingly, 35.4% of respondents expect private equity to be the biggest buyer

Skilled Nursing News, 01/30/2026

Three-day Stay Rule Backfired Post Pandemic

Medicare's three-day rule was introduced 60 years ago to moderate costs of care for hospital patients headed to nursing home care.

Investigators found that reinstating the three-day rule after it was suspended during the pandemic resulted in longer hospital stays without improving health outcomes or lowering SNF use.

Hospital stays of three or more days by Medicare patients rose by 1.1 percentage points after the rule was reinstated; the jump was 5.6 percentage points among those who eventually rehabbed at nursing homes.

McKnight's, 02/10/2026

Did CMS Pull a Sneak Attack with Anti-Psychs?

Changes came in January on how antipsychotic drug use was calculated. But apparently unannounced changes were made that could lower star ratings.

The problem is the first regenerated calculations came out Jan. 21, as expected. But many providers who re-ran their reports on or after Jan. 26 found values had changed - with no notification from CMS.

The national average for the long-stay antipsychotic measure was 14.423%. Now with MDS and claims data factored in, it has jumped to 16.69%.

Whether they're a 5-Star or a 2-Star, many facilities may lose a star.

McKnight's, 02/09/2025

Attitudes Toward Aging Effect Transition into SNF

A recent study examined how perceptions of aging influence both residents and caregivers, ultimately impacting the overall environment and care standards within these facilities.

The study identifies that negative attitudes toward aging can contribute to challenges in providing high-quality care during the

early stages of a resident's adjustment to a nursing home.

These attitudes may affect interactions between staff and residents, as well as residents' own mental and emotional well-being. The findings suggest that fostering more positive perceptions of aging could improve the experiences of new nursing home residents and enhance the quality of care provided during this critical period.

Geneonline, 02/08/2026

Wage Hikes Slow, Turnover Down in Assisted Living

Healthcare Compensation Service reports that all assisted living nursing positions saw wage rates increase last year, but the pace of growth has declined compared to 2024.

RNs saw a 2.96% increase compared to 3.70% pay bump in 2024. Wages for CNAs rose 2.77% in 2025 compared to 3.03% in 2024.

Medication aides saw a 3.15% increase – smaller than the 3.97% increase in 2024.

CEO and president level positions saw an increase of 3.75% in 2025 salary.

Labor availability is still a constraint on senior living operations as turnover for assisted living positions was 34.53% in 2025 - 40.59% for CNAs.

Senior Housing News, 01/30/2026

It's the 'NURSE' Act Ain't Acronyms Fun?

A bill has been introduced designed to address the nationwide nursing shortage by making visas available to foreign nurses working in areas where the federal government has determined there is a nursing workforce shortage.

Named the National Urgent Recruitment for Skilled Employees (NURSE) Visa Act, the measure was introduced by Congressman Don Beyer of Virginia.

The NURSE Visa Act would create 20,000 non-immigrant visas per fiscal year.

Federal authorities project a shortage of 267,330 full-time RNs in 2028 and a shortage of 204,690 full-time RNs in 2033.

U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, news release, 02/04/2026

IN THE TRENCHES –

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

AMERICA: Last season's COVID-19 vaccines delivered protection against hospitalization and severe outcomes, particularly for seniors. Estimated vaccine effectiveness (VE) against virus-associated hospitalization reached 40% among immunocompetent adults and 45% (95% CI 31-56) among seniors specifically. For protection against invasive mechanical ventilation or death, estimated effectiveness reached 79% among immunocompetent adults overall and 73% for those over 65 (*JAMA Network Open*).

THE WORLD: Multiple randomized clinical trials and analyses of electronic health records (EHRs) indicate that metformin, a widely available diabetes drug, may reduce the risk of developing long COVID when taken during or shortly after acute COVID-19 infection. The study looked at overweight or obese people and found a strong protective association between metformin use and reduced risk of long COVID. The research suggest that starting metformin during COVID infection can reduce long COVID 40%-to^0% (*Clinical Infectious Diseases*).

SOUTH CAROLINA: The Department of Public Health (DPH) said the state's outbreak total is now 876, after adding 29 more cases since January 30; 841 (96%) of the 876 cases are in Spartanburg County; County has recorded 28 cases. Almost two-thirds of cases (555) have occurred in patients ages 5 to 17 (*CIDRAP*).

FLORIDA: Ave Maria University in Ave Maria, Florida announced a growing measles outbreak on campus. At least 12 cases have been confirmed, and four patients have required hospitalization (*NBC News*).

AMERICA: Researchers from Colgate University and Syracuse University found that politically conservative U.S. adults living in liberal areas were both less hesitant about COVID vaccines and more likely to receive booster doses than conservatives living in conservative regions of the country (*PLOS ONE*).

CANADA: Researchers from the Canadian Sentinel Practitioner Surveillance Network conducted a study, which evaluated samples from patients aged one year or older who had acute respiratory illness. Estimated effectiveness against H3N2 by age-group was 36% for ages 1 to 17 years and 48% for 18 to 64 years, VE was lowest in adults aged 65 years and older at 25% (*CIDRAP*).

THE WORLD: President Donald Trump signed into law a \$5.9 billion spending package aimed at supporting the global response to HIV/AIDS and global public health. The signing of the appropriations bill was hailed by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as providing life-saving support for millions of people across the globe (*CIDRAP*).

AMERICA: Researchers analyzed health information from nearly 60,000 women ages 18 to 45 living southern Sweden. About 75% of the women were vaccinated against COVID-19 and 97% of those shots were mRNA vaccines. When they compared childbirth rates and miscarriages between vaccinated and unvaccinated women, they found no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The research also showed pregnant women who contracted COVID after being vaccinated were far less likely to be hospitalized (*New York Post*).

THE WORLD: The U.S. recorded more than 2,000 cases last year, more than in any other year in three decades, and could surpass the 2025 total in 2026. The UK, Spain, Austria and three other nations all lost their official 'measles free' label in January. Canada lost its in November, and the U.S. is projected to follow suit in April. Estimates indicate each person with measles would infect, on average, 12–18 other people if everyone around them were susceptible to the disease. Up to 90% of people who are not immune will get measles if they encounter an infected person (*Nature*).

CALIFORNIA: Health officials in San Bernardino County have confirmed the first case of measles in the county since 2023. The county's Department of Public Health said the case involves an unvaccinated child who was visiting from

another state. The agency said the infected child visited the Walmart Supercenter in Ontario on Jan. 29 between noon and 3 p.m., and that county health officials are investigating whether others may have been exposed to the virus there (*The Los Angeles Times*).

THE WORLD: Previous studies provide evidence that the shingles vaccine may help prevent cardiovascular conditions, such as heart disease and stroke, and slow biological aging. Additionally, two studies last year and one more recently that analyzed health records of 230,000 people, indicate the shingles vaccine may help reduce or delay dementia diagnosis in older adults (*The Lancet*).

IOWA: A bill moving quickly through the Statehouse this week would remove all vaccine requirements for Iowa students. The sponsor, Rep Zach Dieken wrote, "The bill doesn't prohibit a parent from making their own informed choice. It just says the government can't force you to do it while dangling the carrot of education in front of you." pediatricians are raising alarms over the potential impact of the legislation if it's passed (*WHO-TV*).

AMERICA: In a University of California study, older women with a history of anxiety and depressive symptoms were significantly more likely to develop long COVID than those without such symptoms. A history of depressive or anxiety symptoms was not associated with higher odds of testing positive for COVID. But women who reported mental illness symptoms before the pandemic had 78% higher odds of developing long COVID (*Menopause*).

TEXAS: Two cases of tuberculosis and 18 cases of COVID-19 were recently identified at a massive immigration detention center in El Paso. The infections occurred at the 5000-bed ICE tent facility on the Ft. Bliss Army base near El Paso.

COVID-19, 02/012/2026

World Total Cases
779,102,505516

World Total Deaths
7,110,188

U.S. Total Deaths
1,234,286

World Health Organization

Staff Yes! Prasad No! Moderna Flu Vax App Halts

Top FDA official Vinay Prasad overruled the agency's reviewers when he refused to accept Moderna's application for a new influenza vaccine.

Agency officials familiar with the matter said the team of career scientists was ready to review Moderna's application, and that the head of the vaccine office, wrote a detailed memo explaining why the FDA should embark on the review.

The moves to overrule staff and reject the application are the latest instances of Prasad subjecting vaccines to harsher scrutiny.

Vaccine skepticism is seeping into the FDA as health Sec. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a known vaccine critic.

Stat, 02/11/2026

Pharmacy-Led Clinics Improve Vaccination Rates

The CMS-developed Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organizations set out to increase nursing home residents' vaccine rates to prevent respiratory diseases including COVID-19, pneumonia, and influenza.

That organization partnered with the Pennsylvania Pharmacists Care Network.

Nineteen pharmacies operated clinics in 33 nursing homes.

For one year beginning in March 2023, the pharmacies administered 4,938 vaccines to nursing home residents including 2,193 COVID-19 vaccines, 1,193 pneumococcal, and 853 influenza vaccines. The average relative improvement rates among nursing home residents after the pharmacist-led clinics were 46.3% for influenza vaccines, 41.4% for COVID-19 vaccines, and 26.3% for pneumococcal vaccines.

Journal of HealthCare Quality, 02/09/2026

Large Share of Older US adults Not Vaccinated

Despite a severe influenza season and rising COVID-19 activity this winter, 42% of adults ages 50 and older remain unvaccinated. In total, 29% said they had

received both vaccines, while 27% had received just the updated flu shot

A University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging also highlights gaps in understanding the vaccines' ability to reduce the risk of severe illness.

The leading reason people gave for not getting vaccinated was thinking they didn't need to, followed by concerns about side effects and doubts about vaccine effectiveness.

Univ. of Michigan news release, 02/03/2026

SNF Surveys Caught Up Assisted Living Who Knows?

Maryland health officials reported tremendous progress on a backlog of nursing home surveys, going from 130 cases last year to just 10 today.

The department had been bringing in more staff to complete surveys, trained other staff to perform the inspections and streamlined the process overall.

But in a House Health Committee briefing on oversight of senior living facilities, officials said they face a rising challenge keeping track of assisted living facilities, many of which are unlicensed and undetected until a complaint is filed.

Maryland Matters, 02/06/2026

Ohio Providers Fighting State For \$1B Back Pay

Ohio skilled nursing providers are fighting a two-fronted funding battle, hoping to capitalize on investments they've already made and to ensure the state supports an incentive program.

Providers argued, and the state Supreme Court agreed, the Legislature meant to adjust payments based on patient complexity.

Judges said the Ohio Department of Medicaid methodology did not account for acuity, shortchanging the incentive pool, and ordered rightful payments.

Four months later, SNFs have not been paid nearly \$1 billion earned since 2024.

Providers who operate on an accrual tax basis may have to count funds they have not received yet as income.

McKnight's, 01/26/2026

ONE COLUMN

Amid Medicaid Inertia, Feds to Accelerate Changes

Providers should expect more fast-paced changes affecting long-term care from federal policymakers in 2026.

That's a key takeaway from ATI Advisory's 2025 Market Recap and 2026 Outlook.

"HR1 & the One Big Beautiful Bill Act became the states' operational imperative. States spent 2025 assessing and planning to implement new requirements: budget planning, benefit and program design, eligibility processes, systems changes, and rural health transformation planning, all of which compressed the state policy calendar," the consulting firm said. "Implementation and compliance displaced experimentation and slowed state-level innovation in favor of operational execution."

That trend may continue, especially as lawmakers begin to struggle with the possible need for rate cuts.

But the dual policy aims of slowing healthcare cost growth and promoting greater efficiency through value-based care initiatives will likely continue to shape federal changes.

Those strategies will affect Medicare Advantage, accountable care models and Centers for Medicaid & Medicaid payment policies affecting skilled nursing and long-term care. Providers should get ready now, ATI warned, especially with new bundled payment models that could intersect with the launch of new accountable care organizations.

When it comes to growing dementia and long-term care needs, ATI forecasts "increased political and programmatic appetite for caregiver supports, dementia services and LTC coverage pre-Medicaid."

But those will be packaged as solutions that reduce longer-term spending, potentially at the expense of nursing homes fighting for their share of the aging demographic.

McKnight's, 1/22/2026

Next Step Properties Placed in Receivership

Eleven nursing homes operated by Massachusetts-based Next Step Healthcare have been placed in court-appointed receivership, with iCare Health Network in Connecticut hired to manage day-to-day operations.

A Middlesex County judge made the decision following news from Next Step's landlord, companies affiliated with Cuarzo Healthcare REIT, that the operator is in severe financial distress, owing nearly \$15 million in unpaid rent and fees, owed mostly from 2022 and 2023.

Audits show insolvency, chronic late or missed rent payments since 2022, and poor inspection records which include cases of immediate jeopardy to residents.

Another \$3 million is owed to the lender.

Skilled Nursing News, 02/06/2026

AARP Opposes the New Staffing Rule

In a letter to CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz, AARP asks that the Biden-era staffing mandate be re-established.

In part the letter reads: "American taxpayers have been paying for care that many facilities simply are not providing.

Rolling back these standards would weaken accountability, undermine program integrity, and allow facilities to continue receiving billions in taxpayer dollars without demonstrating they have enough staff to care for the residents they are paid to serve.

AARP opposes repealing these standards. We are, however, appreciative that the proposal maintains enhanced facility assessment and transparency provisions of the rule."

AARP letter to Dr. Oz, 02/02/2026

LeadingAge Expanding Its Reach on West Coast

LeadingAge California is expanding its work into Hawaii, Idaho and Nevada under a new regional brand, LeadingAge Pacific West.

The association will continue to operate as LeadingAge California in that state.

LeadingAge California President and CEO Jeanne Parker Martin, who also will head LeadingAge Pacific West, said she is aware that each state has its own unique cultural contexts and community needs

The regional organization will be led by the LeadingAge California team and its board of directors.

LeadingAge news release, 01/23/2026

Shots Fired by Employees In a Kansas Nursing Home

An argument at a senior care facility ended in gunfire early last Tuesday morning.

Officers responded to the Healthcare Resort of Leawood. around 3:30 a.m.

Investigators determined two employees started arguing and it escalated. One of the employees pulled a gun and shot at his coworker. The coworker returned fire according to officers.

No one living at the facility was involved in the incident. No one was injured, including the two employees.

KCTV-TV, 02/10/2026

Senior Living Investment Opportunities Rising

The senior living and care investments are emerging from years of "turbulence," setting the stage for owners and operators to recapitalize either with new loans or with new investors.

Nachum Soroka, vice president of lending for Eastern Union said, "Some are saying, 'Now that we finally emerged from the turbulence, we're actually ready to divest.'"

"We're at a point where we think we can recoup some of our investment or whatever it is and focus our operations elsewhere."

The sector is on "proper footing" in 2026, he said, adding that the trend will continue of larger operators acquiring smaller SNFs.

Senior Living, 02/02/2026

Briefly in the News

Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) are teaming up to "break up big medicine." The lawmakers introduced legislation to crack down on health care conglomerates that own multiple parts of the industry — including pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), which act as a conduit between insurers and drug manufacturers, and pharmacies themselves. Warren and Hawley's "Break Up Big Medicine Act" proposes prohibiting parent companies from owning a medical provider or management services organization and a PBM or insurer (*The Hill*).

In the past year, waiting times for mental health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs have increased while morale among employees has plummeted with the loss of 40,000 people. Actions taken by President Donald Trump, VA Secretary Doug Collins and the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, have affected services and research at the VA, harmed workers and delayed care and benefits to veterans (*The Military Times*).

As the Winter Olympic Games get underway, the World Anti-Doping Agency is monitoring an unexpected class of drugs: GLP-1 receptor agonists. Patterns of use of these drugs will be tracked both in and out of competition. The prohibitive list of drugs may include any substance that meet two of three criteria: it has the potential to enhance sport performance; represents a health risk to the athlete; or violates the spirit of sport (*MedPage Today*).

Physicians described how restrictive noncompete agreements have hurt their careers and their patients. FTC Chair Andrew Ferguson said the agency plans to address anticompetitive noncompete agreements. At the same time, he made clear that the FTC had no interest in pursuing a blanket ban -- something the Biden administration tried and failed to implement (*MedPage Today*).

With only a snort a week, a new drug might keep patients safe from several respiratory viruses - and the University of Maryland is willing to pay more than \$1,000 for people willing to test the nasal spray (*The Baltimore Sun*).