

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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Vol 10

03/22/2026

They said it

"So, if you don't know anything else about caring about residents, we're their only companion if no one else comes. So, who else they got? We family" Portia Wilcox, a CNA in Rochester, NY

"Every governor, all 50, engaged us to contribute money so all of us can train more nurses designed for nursing home staffing, especially in rural areas. And it's gonna work. We'll launch it over the summer" Administrator Dr. Mehmet OZ after CMS nearly doubled funds for nurse training campaign

"We don't want prior authorization to be a barrier to beneficiaries receiving care if it's just a way to delay care"

Kate Blackwell, director of the Division of Ambulatory Payment Models for the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation

Widespread 'Alarming' Misuse Of Antipsychotics in SNFs

An HHS OIG review of nursing home surveys found significant misuse of antipsychotic drugs especially among residents with dementia.

The medications were often used to control behavior for staff convenience; nursing homes frequently failed to follow required safety measures to protect; Medical Directors did not prevent inappropriate use, and: pharmacists failed to flag concerns or suggest GDRs.

Additionally, weak policies and procedures undermined safeguards intended to protect residents.

The news comes after CMS said this month that the agency was "actively" reviewing federal rules on antipsychotic use for residents in nursing homes.

Skilled Nursing News, 03/19/2026

Policy Brief: CMPs May Be Too Small to Be Effective

A policy brief released Wednesday by the Rockefeller Institute of Government questions whether CMS is setting penalties that truly drive compliance.

In the analysis, CMPs imposed on nursing homes in 2023, were relatively small compared with facility revenues. "Penalties that are less than half a percent of annual net revenue may not be enough to deter future regulatory noncompliance," the brief notes.

CMS can impose CMPs from a few thousand to several hundred thousand dollars per facility,

However, the brief notes that little is known about whether these fines effectively deter noncompliance and calls for more research.

Skilled Nursing News, 03/18/2026

CMS Says It Wants to Reform Prior Auths

Blaming prior authorization for "eroding trust between payers and providers," CMS officials say they are evaluating how prior approvals might be better targeted to improve healthcare quality and operations.

The agency is also beginning to collect more information on Medicare Advantage coverage decisions to help guide consumer choice and inform future government reforms.

Prior authorization is "an enormous drain on the system, both from an administrative efficiency standpoint and as it fundamentally erodes the patient experience by prolonging [getting] access to care that their benefits should give them access to," said CMS Senior Advisor Joyce Lau.

McKnight's, 03/17/2026

Judge Blocks Junior's Overhaul of Vax Policy

A federal judge in Boston has temporarily blocked federal health officials from cutting the number of vaccines recommended for children and says Health Sec. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. likely violated federal procedures when he fired

the entire CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

A number of leading medical groups raised alarms that the vaccine recommendation changes made under Kennedy would undermine protections against a half-dozen diseases.

The ruling puts on hold Kennedy's ACIP appointments and the vaccine recommendations made by those members -- including for shots against influenza and COVID.

HHS officials indicated they plan to appeal.

MedPage Today, 03/16/2026

More LPNs, Fewer RNs Unions Re-Shape Staffing

Following unionization, nursing homes increased their use of licensed practical nurses with staffing ratios rising 4.2%, six years after staff joined a union.

Meanwhile, registered nurse (RN) staffing declined 9.1%. Researchers said there may be a "substitution effect" happening, where employers replace higher-paid RNs with lower-paid LPNs to offset increased labor costs associated with unionization.

In an average-size nursing home of 79 residents, this substitution translates to a drop in 3.2 RN hours per day.

That aligns with economic models in which unions negotiate wages and benefits, while employers manage costs and retain control over staffing decisions.

Skilled Nursing News, 03/17/2026

Resident Died in Snow Connecticut Closes SNF

The state has ordered the closure of Bickford Health Care Center in Windsor Locks following an investigation into the death of a patient who was able to leave the building unnoticed and died after spending hours out in the cold.

Police said Margaret Healey, a 93-year-old Alzheimer's patient left the building at 1:50 AM Feb.8 and was not missed until 4:45 AM.

She was found unresponsive in the snow just 40 feet from the building. She died two hours later.

Hartford Courant, 03/13/2026

IN THE TRENCHES

Vaccines, COVID-19, Flu, Measles & Other Outbreaks Around the Globe

MICHIGAN: A long-term study from Michigan State University (MSU) finds that most college students bounced back emotionally after the **COVID-19** pandemic, with improved psychological functioning, less loneliness, and more satisfaction with their lives (*CIDRAP*).

CAPITOL HILL: Sen. Bernie Sanders is demanding that Senate Health Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy hold a hearing to set the record straight that there is no link between **vaccines** and autism. Cassidy, R-La., a doctor, has been outspoken about his belief that vaccines are “safe and effective and will not cause autism” (*NBC News*).

SOME OF THE STATES: Aiming to reverse recent changes to federal **vaccine** recommendations, 15 states led by Democrats are suing the Trump administration. The lawsuit, filed by a coalition of 14 attorneys general and the governor of Pennsylvania, asks the courts to nullify the administration’s decision in January to reduce the number of diseases children are routinely immunized against to 11 from 17 (*The New York Times*).

AMERICA: They’re prominent talking points for Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his top officials: Taking Tylenol while pregnant could be linked to autism. Antidepressants may be harmful during pregnancy. Aluminum salts in vaccines might pose a health risk. And **COVID** shots don’t benefit healthy children. The remarks have sowed confusion over the past year, as scientists warn there isn’t evidence to back them up. Nevertheless, federal health agencies have pursued policies based on the assertions (*NBC News*).

CAPITOL HILL: Sen. Bernie Sanders is demanding that Senate Health Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy hold a hearing to set the record straight that there is no link between vaccines and autism. Cassidy, R-La., a doctor, has been outspoken

SOUTH AFRICA: In a clinic in Cape Town earlier this year, a woman rolled up her sleeve and became the first person enrolled in what is one of the most consequential **HIV** treatment trials ever attempted on African soil. Fourteen months earlier, the program – known as BRILLIANT 011 and is the flagship of an Africa-led consortium of scientists researching a potential HIV vaccine – had been days from launch when a stop-work order arrived from Washington (*The Independent*).

ATLANTA: Health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has revealed two new members of his handpicked panel of **vaccine** advisers, ahead of a meeting rescheduled for March. Kennedy said in a statement that Sean G. Downing, a primary care doctor licensed in Florida, and Angelina Farella, a pediatrician in Texas, would join the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a group that advises the federal government on which vaccines to recommend to the public (*Stat*).

AMERICA: The Department of Homeland Security announced a group of former U.S. Coast Guard members who were discharged after refusing to receive the **COVID-19** vaccine have been reinstated. Then DHS Secretary Kristi Noem said that this group of 56 service members, who were removed under a vaccination requirement imposed by former President Biden in 2021, will receive back pay for the time period they were not allowed to serve (*The Hill*).

EUROPE: The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is recommending marketing authorization for *mCombrifax*, Moderna’s combined mRNA vaccine for protecting older adults against **COVID-19** and flu. The recommendation was made by the EMA’s Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use, which looked at data from a phase 3 trial involving 8,000 participants aged 50 and older (*CIDRAP*).

FLORIDA: An emergency rule from the Florida Department of Health is in effect that could restrict tens of thousands of people from accessing **HIV** medication. The state issued cuts to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, a federal-state partnership that provides free FDA-approved **HIV** medication for low-income,

uninsured or underinsured people. Under the emergency rule, eligibility for ADAP was lowered to include those at or below 130% of the federal poverty level, which equals about \$20,345 per year for a one-person household (*BC News*).

GENEVA: The WHO has recommended that vaccine manufacturers completely change the three viral strains included in the **vaccines** for the Northern Hemisphere’s next influenza season. As expected, the WHO recommended that vaccines for the next flu season includes a new variant of the influenza virus that started to increase last fall—too late for it to be included in this winter’s flu vaccines. (*CIDRAP*).

DENMARK: The WHO has certified Denmark for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission) of **HIV and syphilis**, recognizing the country’s sustained commitment to ensuring every child is born free of these infections (*WHO new release*).

COLORADO: Health officials confirmed a second case of measles at Broomfield High School and warned the public of possible contact with the highly contagious disease at high-traffic Chick-fil-A and Chipotle locations in the area (*The Colorado Sun*).

NORTH DAKOTA & COLORADO: Two new cases of **measles** were confirmed in North Dakota bringing the total to 23 for the year so far. The two new cases are in Traill and Pembina counties, which both border Minnesota (*Minn. Public Radio*). Public health disease-trackers have identified four more cases of **measles** in an outbreak linked to two schools in Broomfield, Colorado. The newly announced infections all involve unvaccinated children (*The Colorado Sun*).

COVID-19, 03/19/2026

World Total Cases
779,166,580

World Total Deaths
7,112,772

U.S. Total Deaths
1,236,232

World Health Organization

50+% SNFs Changed Owners During Pandemic

More than half of US nursing homes (57.8%) and 63% of for-profits changed ownership during the first three years of the pandemic.

That was a staggering increase over previous estimates that suggested 7% to 13% of all nursing homes changed hands annually between 1993 and 2010.

Their findings indicate that 22.7% of government-owned nursing homes included in a sample of more than 12,000 nursing homes converted to for-profit status.

Another 7.1% converted to privately held nonprofits, meaning nearly one-third of the nation's public nursing homes were wiped out by COVID-era pressures.

McKnight's, 03/15/2026

Trump's Cronies Clamping Down on Kennedy

Ahead of the midterm elections the White House is more tightly controlling the messaging and policies—including vaccines—coming from HHS.

Aides close to President Trump decided to take a more active role in managing Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s department in the face of polling that shows his vaccine moves are unpopular.

Administration officials have grown increasingly frustrated with what they viewed as foul-ups inside HHS.

Aides close to Trump are worried that perceived disorganization and a focus on vaccines could damage the president's party in the November elections.

The Wall Street Journal, 03/13/2026

Vaccination Effectiveness Lower This Season Than Last

This season's influenza vaccine effectiveness (VE) rates against outpatient visits and hospitalizations may be lower than last season's, pushed in part by a viral mismatch between the vaccine virus and circulating strains.

Based on U.S. surveillance network data from September 2025 to February 2026, estimated VE rates against influenza A-

and B-related outpatient visits for adults ranged from 22% to 34%, and 30% to 41% for those ages 65 and older specifically, while rates against hospitalizations reached 30% and 31%, respectively.

By late February, less than half of U.S. children and adolescents (48%) and adults (47%) were estimated to have received a flu vaccination in the latest season.

CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

UnitedHealth to Hand Over Documents in AI Case

A federal magistrate judge in Minnesota has ordered UnitedHealth Group to produce a wide range of documents in an ongoing lawsuit accusing the insurer of using an AI algorithm to wrongfully deny Medicare Advantage members post-acute care.

The plaintiffs allege the tool overrode physicians' decisions and led to premature denials of medically necessary skilled nursing facility care, which Optum has disputed.

The order largely sided with the plaintiffs in their motion to compel discovery, granting or partially granting requests across six of seven categories.

Becker's, 03/11/2026

\$60M to Fix, So Albany SNF, St. Peter's, is Closing

St. Peter's Nursing Center, in Albany, is closing after 68 years the decision was made by representatives of residents, staff, medical professionals, Sisters of Mercy, leadership, and the non-profit governing board.

St. Peter's said the building is in need of upgrades that are estimated to cost \$60 million, which is beyond what they can afford. This includes building infrastructure upgrades and modernizing all resident living areas.

St. Peter's said the proposed closure plan and certificate of need application were filed with the New York State Department of Health and were approved by the state.

St. Peter's news released, 03/06/2026

ONE COLUMN False Claims Act's Whistleblower Provision May Get Supreme Attention

A legal ruling expected any day could lead to permanent changes in how the government handles the kind of False Claim Act cases, i.e., Whistleblower cases, that have long dogged skilled nursing operations.

In a late 2024 decision in *United States ex rel. Zafirov v. Florida Medical Associates*, the District Court found that Whistleblowers, who use the False Claims Act's *qui tam* provision are essentially appointing themselves government officials in violation of the Constitution.

By making allegations against a healthcare provider, they can force the federal government to open an investigation and then keep a case going for years, even if the Department of Justice declines it. But they've not been appointed to those roles.

Several Supreme Court justices have indicated they would be willing to reevaluate that part of the False Claims Act, and an appeal of Zafirov could be the key they need to open that door.

"If the Court of Appeals were to affirm, finding the False Claims Act unconstitutional in any respect, it could cause a major pause in the way enforcement all across healthcare is carried out," said Thomas Barnard, coordinator of Baker Donelson's Health Care Investigation Response Team.

If the Eleventh Circuit rules against Whistleblowers – legally called relators – the biggest impact would initially be felt only in the three states it has jurisdiction over: Alabama, Florida and Georgia.

But such a ruling would create a split in the federal judiciary as other Circuit Courts have previously held that the FCA's whistleblower provisions are legal.

The initial Zafirov decision has already had some influence over False Claims suits — though they have not dampened the eagerness of whistleblowers to bring new suits.

McKnight's, 03/17/2026

CMS Nearly Triples Funds for Nurse Training

Providers welcomed the “good news” that the budget for a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services nursing home staffing campaign has more than doubled to reach \$200 million.

The campaign was originally set to devote \$75 million to nurse training and recruitment for the LTC sector and is set to begin in earnest this summer.

CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz told attendees at the CMS Quality Conference in Baltimore that a related collaboration with all states had led to the near tripling of the designated spending, and that donations will help cover overhead so “all the money goes to training nurses.”

McKnight's, 03/16/2026

Schwartz Case Still Casting Large Shadow

An attorney who allegedly helped secure a pardon from Donald Trump for a former nursing home operator has been charged in New York with attempting to extort \$500,000 from a former client believed to be ex-nursing home owner Joseph Schwartz.

Nass claimed the Schwartz family had agreed to pay him \$600,000 to secure the pardon of which \$100,000 was paid, but then Schwartz's son refused to pay the remainder.

Prosecutors say Nass hired an individual to ‘do anything and everything’ to force the client's (Schwartz's) son to pay for services.”

Nass was released on a \$5 million bond.

The Daily Beast, 03/14/2026

Minn.'s Providers Sue Over Board's 'Unchecked Power'

Care Providers of Minnesota and LeadingAge Minnesota have filed a lawsuit asking a federal judge to block the state's 2023 Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board from imposing any existing or new rules.

Among its first moves were actions setting a 2026 minimum wage of \$19 an hour for

all covered nursing home workers, higher minimums for nurses and setting new holiday requirements.

The two associations asked a federal court to declare the board's structure and its actions unconstitutional.

Other states, including Rhode Island and Oregon, have toyed with creating similar boards to dictate long-term care policy.

McKnight's, 3/16/2026

Nursing Home Vax Rate Higher Than Ass't. Living

Nursing homes were more likely to participate in vaccination programs for seven vaccine-preventable illnesses and less likely to have residents hospitalized for those illnesses compared to assisted living communities.

Researchers analyzed data from 736 NHs and 623 ALs and found that more than 90% of ALs reported sometimes or frequently hospitalizing residents for influenza and COVID-19.

Corresponding rates in NHs were 28.3% and 39.4%, respectively. This pattern was also consistent for pneumococcal disease (85.1% in ALs vs 46.9% in NHs) and RSV (49.9% vs 23.5%).

Journal of the American Medical Directors Association, February 2026

Indy Scraps Managed Care For Medicaid's LTC Patients

One of at least 24 states that gave control of institutional long-term care to private insurance companies is walking away from the failed experiment.

Indiana Gov. Michael Braun (R) on Thursday signed into law a change that will move nursing home patients out of the Medicaid managed care program after 100 days.

They'll return to a Fee-for-Service model, which was used to cover long-term care before the state launched its PathWays for Aging managed care program in 2024.

The program allowed Humana, Elevance Health and United Health Care to oversee Medicaid coverage for, about 21,000 Hoosiers residing in nursing homes.

McKnight's, 03/15/2026

Briefly in the News

The Trump administration, which has been skeptical of vaccines that prevent infections, is going all in on a new initiative to deploy novel vaccines against cancer. HHS, through the National Cancer Institute, has initiated a potential \$200 million public-private partnership to fund clinical trials of vaccines that spark an immune attack on tumors. These vaccines may ward off cancer in patients who have been treated for the disease, but are at high risk for recurrence (*The Wall Street Journal*).

The U.S. health regulator issued a draft guidance on Monday to help drugmakers develop cheaper versions of complex biologic medicines, aiming to lower the cost of treatments for diseases such as cancer and autoimmune disorders. Biologic medicines, made from living cells, are among the most expensive drugs on the market. While they make up about 5% of prescriptions, they account for 51% of drug spending, (*Reuters*).

Providing health care to children and pregnant people who would qualify for Medicaid if not for their immigration status will cost Colorado more than six times (611%) what was projected this year. Because of higher-than-forecast enrollment, the state is expecting that the Cover All Coloradans program will cost the state \$104.5 million in the fiscal year that began July 1 (*The Colorado Sun*).

A group of Latin American university researchers analyzed World Health Organization global health surveys and temperature data from the Climatic Research Unit dataset at the University of East Anglia that included 156 countries between 2000 and 2022. They found that as global temperatures rise, people are becoming less physically active, and this shift could lead to hundreds of thousands of additional premature deaths worldwide in the coming decades. (*ABC News*).

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran is a military strategy with vast consequences for the global economy, not just in the form of higher oil prices, but with disruptions in supply chains involving metals and manufacturing, food prices and at some point in the future it could affect drug prices. The U.S. gets about 47% of its generic medication from India which are shipped through the Strait (*CNBC*).