

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

Edited by Drew Vogel

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They said it

The data contained in these reports indicate that the disparities the Subcommittee revealed either endure or have grown worse" Sens.

Blumenthal and Hawley in letter to insurance companies re: Prior Authorizations

"This is an important milestone for the trial, and marks the next phase in our multinational collaborative journey to develop a Bundibugyo ebolavirus vaccine" Katrina Pollock, PhD,

University of Oxford announcing the first volunteer for the new vaccine for the Ebola virus

"With fewer state surveyors onsite for a shorter period time, performing fewer survey tasks and looking at the care provided to fewer residents, quality of care and quality of life problems will be missed - never identified and never

corrected" Toby S. Edelman, Senior Policy Attorney at the Center for Medicare Advocacy

Under-Staffing Cost Nursing Home Chain \$15 Million

California-based nursing home operator Sweetwater Care Resource will pay \$15 million to resolve allegations that it repeatedly failed to meet state staffing requirements.

Data indicates that Sweetwater skilled nursing facilities were staffed below minimum levels in over 14,100 instances. The chain, which operates 17 nursing homes, will pay \$12.5 million in penalties. The remaining \$2.5 million will fund staffing improvements as well as hiring an independent compliance monitor for three years.

The facilities must also use a new methodology to determine daily staffing

needs, which may be a first in a state settlement of this kind.

McKnight's, 07/29/2026

**Pay Hike for
Skilled Nursing
Homes
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Bill Takes On AI Utilized by MA Plans

Medicare Advantage plans could no longer rely solely on automated tools to make coverage decisions under a new House bill that requires a physician to review and approve any artificial intelligence-generated prior authorization requests or denials.

The bipartisan measure would stop plans from using AI to automatically deny prior authorization for covered services, including skilled nursing, without meeting key safeguards, including:

- Proof that a qualified physician has evaluated the case under the direction of a plan's medical director.
- Allowing direct communication with the reviewing physician.
- Requiring the disclosure of AI usage.

Organizations representing the skilled nursing industry welcomed the bill.

McKnight's, 07/28/2026

The Risk-Based Survey is Dangerous for Residents

"Posting a golden trophy icon on the *Care Compare* website for nursing homes meeting RBS's criteria misleads by falsely suggesting that nursing homes with the golden trophy provide better care," said Toby Edelman of the Center for Medicare Advocacy.

Researchers who have looked at performance measurement data recognize that such data are credible for only the lowest-performing facilities.

The criteria for qualifying for an RBS do not reflect nursing homes providing high-

quality care. The classifications applied to only 5% of deficiencies.

Moreover, reports by the GAO and HHS-OIG have repeatedly found that state agencies miss many problems in SNFs.

McKnight's, 07/29/2026

AI Speeds Up Development of New Drugs

Artificial intelligence is dramatically speeding up drug development and priming a bigger automation push that's changing the trajectory of early-stage pharma research.

A survey of 80 biopharma leaders found that AI is compressing drug developers' preclinical costs and timelines by as much as 70%.

That's fueling demand for cutting-edge software, sequencing tools and computer models that will help churn out more experimental treatments in the next five years.

AI can't replace scientific intuition. But the way it can streamline the grueling R&D before human testing begins is making computer screens as important a feature of drug design as traditional laboratories.

Axios, 07/20/2026

Senate Still Seeking Info on Prior Auths

Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Josh Hawley are demanding accountability from the nation's largest Medicare Advantage insurers as congressional pressure mounts to reduce prior authorizations and other barriers to care for seniors.

In letters to UnitedHealthcare, CVS Health's Aetna, and Humana this month, the members of the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations requested records related to refusals of care for skilled nursing, inpatient rehabilitation and long-term acute care hospital stays since 2023.

Blumenthal and Hawley said those reports suggested "little has changed" and "call into question" claims about changes the companies since a 2024 report.

McKnight's, July 27, 2026

IN THE TRENCHES

COVID-19, Flu, Measles, Vaccines, & Other Worldwide Outbreaks

CONGO: Confirmed cases in Congo's ongoing Ebola outbreak have reached 3,262, its Ministry of Health said. It's nearly the same as the 2018-2020 outbreak that is the largest ever recorded in the country. Data from the Congolese health ministry showed that 1,437 patients have died out of the 3,262 cases, in what officials have said is the fastest Ebola outbreak on record (*AP*).

AMERICA: A Kaiser Permanente study indicated infants born to mothers vaccinated before, during, or soon after pregnancy for COVID-19 or flu were more likely to receive vaccines than those born to unvaccinated mothers. The authors wrote "Improving maternal vaccine coverage during those times may improve child vaccine coverage, ensuring continuous protection in early life" (*Pediatrics*).

AMERICA: The U.S. has now recorded more cases (2318 cases) of measles in 2026 than in any other year since the virus was declared eliminated in 2000. In fact, the U.S. has had more cases reported the last two years than all years between 2000 and 2024. Combined. With five months left in the year, the case count toppled last year's record of 2200+ cases (*The New York Times*).

FLORIDA: Top health official called the measles vaccine "effective" but stopped short of imploring people to get inoculated against the disease. Dr. Joseph Ladapo was in Orlando for an event focused on mental health and kids (*WKMG-TV*).

DELAWARE: The state now has four measles cases after going more than a decade without a single detection, and the state has officially declared an outbreak. It is not known at this time if the cases are connected to an unvaccinated Kent County man, the state's initial measles case reported last week (*CIDRAP*).

THREE COUNTRIES: Afghanistan reported four cases of wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) last week. All four cases had paralysis onset in June, bringing the country's total cases this year to 15. Elsewhere, Nigeria reported two circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 cases with paralysis onset in June, bringing its 2026 total to 30 cases, and the Central African Republic reported one cVDPV2 case, bringing its total for the year to four cases (*Global Polio Eradication Initiative*).

THE WORLD: WHO announced three new cases of human H9N2 avian flu from July 10 to 16, all reported from China. All three patients had exposure to live poultry; two cases were in 4-year-old boys, and one case was in a 44-year-old man. The boys have recovered. but the adult remains in an intensive care unit. Of the 173 cases reported since 2015, 170 were in China (*The World Health Organization*).

LOUISIANA: New Orleans is facing dangerously hot conditions. With no rain and clear conditions expected throughout much of the week, temperatures are hovering in the mid-90s. The "feels like" temperatures in and around the city could soar to 115 degrees on Tuesday (July 28) and Wednesday. The city offers some refuge from the heat in the form of air conditioned public buildings open to anyone seeking relief. ... But on Tuesday afternoon, as the heat index neared 110 degrees a number of those sites were closed (*Verite News*).

AMERICA: Taylor Farms released a new statement amid an investigation into the source of a cyclosporiasis outbreak across the U.S. The company, which remains at the center of U.S. health officials' investigation, said it has taken added precautions despite no positive test results involving its product so far. "According to the FDA, there are no confirmed positive sample results for product testing for Cyclospora as of July 19, 2026," Taylor Farms said in its statement (*NBC Chicago*).

ATLANTA: Amid the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the CDC has relieved the two top leaders of its Ebola response team of their positions. Incident manager Satish

Pillai, MD, MPH, and deputy incident manager Peggy Honein, PhD, MPH, were replaced by Henry Walke, MD, MPH, who is the director of the CDC's Office of Readiness and Response (*MedPage Today*).

CAPITOL HILL: Besides the illness and death, the disruption and the loneliness, Americans remember the pandemic for its vitriol. The handling of COVID divided the parties, the states, families and neighbors and it's taken years, in many cases, to repair the damage. Former COVID czar Anthony Fauci's appearance on Capitol Hill Wednesday brought it all back. Rather than an evaluation of what went wrong and right, or how to do better next time, the rage stood out (*Politico*).

AMERICA: About 12,000 pounds of smoked bacon imported from Canada were recalled because of lack of proper reinspection before entering the U.S. The bacon from Maple Leaf Foods was shipped to grocery distributors and retailers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington state. Government inspects imported products for packaging, documentation, condition and contamination (*The Washington Post*).

SPAIN: Long COVID affected roughly 3% to 5% of healthcare workers at three Spanish hospitals from 2020 to 2023, with prevalence increasing with age and in some occupational groups. The research team analyzed occupational health registry data from 8,441 healthcare workers diagnosed as having COVID-19 at three public hospitals from 2020 through 2023 (*BMC Public Health*).

CONGO: The fastest growing Ebola outbreak ever recorded is leaving thousands more people hungry in eastern Congo, a region engulfed in conflicts and a fight over precious minerals. The World Food Program's acting executive director, Carl Skau, called the outbreak a "crisis on top of a crisis" that has compounded a catastrophic situation with over 5 million Congolese already experiencing emergency-level food insecurity (

AMERICA: Cases of cyclosporiasis, an intestinal illness caused by a parasite, have topped 18,000 in 45 states, according to updated data Wednesday from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since May 1, at least 6,707 cases have been laboratory-

confirmed, including 423 hospitalizations, the CDC noted (*ABC News*).

Senators Question If RFK, Jr's Family Profits from Drug Deal

Four Democratic lawmakers have questioned whether HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s family will profit from a sizeable settlement involving Merck's human papillomavirus vaccine (*Gardasil*).

Sens. Elizabeth Warren (Mass.), Angela Alsobrooks (Md.), Richard Blumenthal (Conn.) and Andy Kim (N.J.) wrote, "We are seeking clarity on whether this settlement may have resulted in a significant financial award to one of your sons, raising fresh concerns about conflicts of interest you may possess" as HHS Secretary.

They also questioned whether Kennedy may have influenced the outcome of the lawsuit, which Merck settled on for \$50 million.

MedPage Today, 07/30/2026

HHS Defers Medicaid Payments from Two States

HHS deferred more than \$1 billion in federal Medicaid payments to California (\$867.5 million) and Minnesota (\$199 million) as the states submit additional documentation supporting certain high-risk Medicaid claims.

The action comes after "focused financial reviews" earmarked additional review before federal matching funds are released. HHS said the deferrals are not permanent cuts and both states will have the opportunity to provide the claims are legitimate.

HHS and its OIG continue to exercise exclusion authorities as a critical tool to remove bad actors from Medicare and Medicaid programs — and, in many cases, permanently bar them from returning.

HHS News release, 07/21/2026

Florida to Investigate Dr. Anthony Fauci

Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier announced a state investigation into Anthony Fauci on Wednesday amid continued GOP scrutiny in Washington.

The COVID czar pushed for pandemic safety requirements such as face mask use and social distancing that drew criticism from Republican lawmakers — particularly in Florida, led by Gov. Ron DeSantis — and prompted dozens of appearances before congressional committees, where he was accused of misleading the public.

Fauci declined to answer questions Wednesday at a contentious Senate hearing, exercising his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Uthmeier announced the launch of a state investigation into Fauci shortly afterward.

Politico, 07/29/2026

Gov't Wants ER Info The Question is – Why?

The Consumer Product Safety Commission, a tiny federal agency tasked with tracking and issuing recalls of dangerous products sold in the U.S., is demanding that some of the nation's biggest health systems turn over detailed, personally identifiable medical records of all patients who seek help at their emergency rooms.

CPSC said the information to be provided to Konza Health — a government contractor. should include names, addresses, and other personal information. Konza representatives described participation as "mandatory" or "required."

KFF Health News, 07/27/2026

Interrupted Meal Breaks Cost Operator Half-Million OT Pay

A North Carolina operator has agreed to pay more than \$502K to resolve a collective action brought by patient care workers who claimed lunch breaks not taken entitled them to overtime pay.

North Carolina CNAs Katrina Cole sued operator, Choice Health Management Services, on behalf of herself and other hourly patient care workers.

The suit is the latest in a series of Fair Labor Standards Act cases in which nursing home employees have successfully recovered wages for break periods that were automatically deducted from their pay.

McKnight's, 07/26/2026

ONE COLUMN

CMS Finalizes Pay Hike for 2027

Skilled nursing providers will get a 2.4% raise for Medicare Part A stays under a 2027 prospective pay rule finalized by CMS Wednesday.

The agency did not take any immediate action on its request for information regarding resetting several key payment triggers within its Payment Driven Payment Model.

The rule ensures about \$882.74 million more in traditional Medicare payments to nursing homes next fiscal year.

Jodi Eyigor, vice president of health policy for LeadingAge, called the pay raise "short of what is needed," given economic uncertainty and increased costs for food, energy and wages.

AHCA President and CEO Clif Porter, however, thanked CMS for "recognizing the importance of maintaining stable Medicare reimbursement for skilled nursing facilities."

"Reimbursement policy that reflects the increasing needs of our patients and the increasing costs to deliver that care is essential to supporting seniors and their caregivers," he said.

The rule will eventually greatly increase reporting for nursing homes. It finalizes new Minimum Data Set submission requirements that will require data for all SNF residents receiving covered skilled care — not just those covered by traditional Medicare. The statement did not reference the one million hours in added work the provision is expected to trigger annually starting in fiscal year 2031.

LeadingAge has long supported the all-payer data collection because "the outcome will be a more complete picture of provider performance and outcome," Eyigor said.

Porter took a more critical approach, noting that completing data submission for patients on Medicare Advantage, Medicaid and other plans would

“drastically increase administrative burden without directly improving clinical care for patients.”

McKnight's, 07/30/2026

5-Star Update Will Impact Referrals, Public Perception

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is increasing quality measure thresholds by one-half of the average improvement in QM scores.

While thresholds to assign star ratings increased, the point thresholds for individual QMs haven't changed, according to AHCA/NCAL. That means some facilities might need higher overall QM performance to maintain the same star rating.

Holly Norelli, vice president of quality and regulatory services for AHCA/NCAL, said the complicated methodology is emblematic of a larger issue with the 5-Star rating system – it fails to give consumers a full picture of nursing home quality.

Skilled Nursing News, 07/28/2026

Haitian TPS Ending Puts A Hurt on FLA Healthcare

The end of TPS for Haitian immigrants, is also the end of their employment authorization.

Healthcare in Florida is expected to feel the hit.

Of the roughly 330,000 Haitians in the U.S. some 35,000 of them work in healthcare in Florida – nurses and CNAs.

The Florida Health Care Association expressed concern about the loss of those workers. And the largest union representing Florida healthcare workers – 1199SEIU's Long-Term Care South – denounced the change.

In a letter to Department of Homeland Security FHCA urged DHS to consider the "unique" workforce needs of long-term care and minimize disruptions to essential caregiving.

Central Florida Public Media, 07/28/2026

DOJ Urged to Withdraw Opinion Putting HCBS in Peril

One hundred congressional Democrats are asking the federal government to reconsider an opinion the lawmakers say

“undermines decades of protections for disability rights,” including the provision of home-and-community-based services in assisted living communities.

In a letter last week the lawmakers called on the DOJ to rescind a June 18 opinion, which they said would undermine both the scope and enforcement of the integration mandate under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

The DOJ opinion suggested that states are not required to provide HCBS to people living with disabilities.

Senior Living, 07/27/2026

A Quarter of LTC Caregivers Are Also Family Caregivers

Patient care staff who pull double duty caring for adult family members make up nearly a quarter of care staff in nursing homes. a status that may keep them from advancing in roles and pay.

Authors of a recent study found these roles likely contribute to “cumulative stress,” with implications for organizational policy in long-term care.

Nursing home participants in the study included more than 890,000 licensed nurses and unlicensed assistive personnel.

Double-duty caregivers made up 22.7% of nursing home care staff. They also skewed older and had more experience.

JAMDA, 07/21/2026

Minn. Providers Solving Labor Issue Themselves

LeadingAge Minnesota Solutions, and Global Care Recruiters (GCR) have formed a strategic partnership to expand ethical international nurse recruitment for aging services providers.

The model is still in its early stages: 59 nurses are currently in the immigration pipeline, a process that typically takes about 22 months.

The first arrivals are expected in Minnesota this winter, followed by a steady monthly pace, with the pipeline projected to grow to 100 to 120 nurses by spring 2027.

There's also potential to expand the provider-led model to additional US markets within five years.

McKnight's, 07/15/2026

Briefly in the News

Prediction markets have permeated the worlds of sports, politics, and reality television shows. The biopharma industry could be next. Kalshi, one of the world's largest prediction market exchanges, said it will start taking bets on clinical trials and regulatory approvals (**Stat**).

Federal health officials say they remain focused on lettuce from Taylor Farms as the source of a multistate outbreak of the diarrhea-causing parasite Cyclospora. FDA officials said a laboratory test incorrectly identified a positive result for Cyclospora on a sample of lettuce from Taylor Farms (**MedPage Today**).

The FDA licensed Ezplaz, the first freeze-dried plasma product available to adults in need of transfusion, on Wednesday. Ezplaz is intended for patients who need plasma -- such as those who are bleeding, need massive transfusion, or are bleeding while on warfarin -- when conventional frozen plasma is not available (**FDA, news release**).

Following a strong second quarter, Ensign Group strengthened its outlook for the year, with company top executives highlighting high occupancy levels at its facilities backed by strength in key clinical metrics. Ensign's success lies in the most recent data outcomes from CMS. The company's same-store facilities achieved quality measure ratings 23% above state averages, survey inspection scores 18% above state and 26% above nationwide average (**Skilled Nursing News**).

"Rethink. Rebuild. Rise." That's the theme of this year's International AIDS conference, which began this week in Rio de Janeiro. "Rethink" is perhaps an understatement. This year, there are encouraging signs regarding the ongoing epidemic — even though 1.2 million people acquired the virus in 2025, the number of AIDS-related deaths was 547,000, the lowest number in 30 years. Yet the fate of the global campaign to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is

now in doubt, as the U.S. aid cuts have taken a tremendous toll (**NPR**).

"Small steps still leave footprints"

Terry Mole Frederick Cornelius