

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT

"COVID is not going away, and it still causes a substantial amount of illness each year"

Dr. William Schaffner, professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

"..... we may come to see more frequent legal collection actions by nursing homes, for example, against the estate of a resident who passes away with a large outstanding balance owed"

Callan Stein of Troutman Pepper Locke responding to CMS' expanding prohibition on third-party guarantees

"I'm an Iraq War veteran. I understand burn pits because I slept next to one for many months"

Doug Collins newly confirmed VA Secretary

MA's Seek Prior Auths Tons More Than Medicare

An analysis shows MA insurers' use of prior authorizations continued to grow to nearly 50 million, up from 37 million in 2021 and 42 million in 2022 – about 125 times more often than regular Medicare.

Medicare beneficiaries in MA plans — now more than half of all insured — have the right to the same care as individual enrolled in traditional or Fee-for-Service Medicare.

Medicare, however, continues to put up far fewer barriers to care. Medicare sought prior authorization for only about 400,000 patient encounters in 2023, although both plan types had roughly the same number of members then.

KFF, 01/30/2025

Resident Killed on Road After Leaving Nursing Home

A resident who walked away from a retirement home in South Jersey was fatally struck on a highway minutes later.

Robert A. Richardson, 89, was found dead at 6:35 a.m. Jan. 31 on Route 130 outside of Azalea at Cinnaminson.

Richardson was seen leaving the nursing home and assisted living facility by a side door approximately five minutes earlier.

He was struck by a tractor trailer and was found on a curb lane of Route 130.

Cherry Hill Courier-Post, 02/06/2025

Beware! CMS Going After Third-Party Pay Policies

A soon-to-expand prohibition on nursing homes' use of third-party financial guarantees could lead to more operators using lawsuits to collect as residents' unpaid debt becomes a bigger financial concern.

CMS has long forbidden the use of such third-party guarantees in nursing homes. But the agency now wants surveyors to scrutinize compliance more intensely, possibly further impeding collections related to care already delivered.

That warning comes as regulators move to target admission and billing policies that mimic financial guarantees — even if they don't technically require third-parties to "guarantee" they'll pay for a friend, family member or other associate's stay.

McKnight's, 01/28/2025

One Health Expert to Lead Pandemic Response Office

The Trump administration has selected Gerald Parker, DVM, PhD, to lead the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy, according to media reports.

Parker, an associate dean for Global One Health at Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, was most recently chair of

the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity at the National Institutes of Health under the Biden administration.

Prior to that, Parker served as a senior advisor for the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the Department of Health and Human Services from August 2020 to February 2021.

CIDRAP, 02/07/2025

Senate Gives Thumbs Up To Collins as VA Secretary

The U.S. Senate on Tuesday confirmed Doug Collins as secretary of veterans affairs, putting the former congressman and Iraq War veteran at the helm of a department that provides crucial care to America's veterans.

Collins, a former Air Force chaplain, was confirmed on a 77-23 vote, becoming the latest addition to President Donald Trump's Cabinet.

The Department of Veterans Affairs manages a more than \$350 billion budget and oversees nearly 200 medical centers and hospitals nationwide. It also manages national cemeteries and works closely with the Defense Department on personnel matters.

AP 02/04/2025

Second-Language Program to Boost Workforce

A SNF in Dunkirk, NY is establishing an "English as a second language" program for the growing population of Spanish-speaking residents in the area.

About 40% of the people in Dunkirk speak Spanish at home compared to 9.2% in the rest of the U.S.

The need to have better means of communication became apparent in the 216-bed Chautauqua Nursing & Rehab Center when staff members who did not speak Spanish increasingly needed to pull other workers to translate.

It was the staff that pitched the idea to facility leadership.

There are now 14 participants, including six new hires.

McKnight's, 01/28/2025

IN THE TRENCHES – COVID-19 & Other Outbreaks in the U.S. and the World

WASHINGTON, D.C: After pointing out that Donald Trump, who tapped RFK, Jr. for HHS Sec. had praised the COVID vaccine as a “miracle.” Sen. Bernie Sanders remarked on Kennedy’s legal effort to block the vaccine in May 2021. Then he asked a blunt question: “Was the COVID vaccine successful in saving millions of lives? “I don’t know,” Kennedy said after a brief pause. “We don’t have a good surveillance system unfortunately. I don’t think anybody can say that” (*Yahoo News*).

CAPITOL HILL: The Senate Finance Committee voted Tuesday to advance to the floor Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s nomination to lead HHS. The 14-13 vote was strictly along party lines. During his confirmation hearings last week, Kennedy denied he was anti-vaccine and insisted he was merely pro-safety and wanted to draw attention to the potential risks of vaccines (*The Hill*).

AMERICA: Last Friday marked five years since the COVID-19 virus was declared a public health emergency by the U.S. and it is still killing thousands. But five years later, the virus is still killing thousands. While the world might not be in a global pandemic anymore, Sean Clarke, a professor of nursing leadership at New York University, said COVID is still a constant presence. “The virus is still persistent and still moving. It’s still not a trivial thing” (*ABC News*).

THE WORLD: The World Health Organization chief asked global leaders to lean on Washington to reverse President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from the U.N. health agency, insisting in a closed-door meeting with diplomats last week that the U.S. will miss out on critical information about global disease outbreaks. But countries also pressed WHO at a key budget meeting about how it might cope with the exit of its biggest donor (*AP*).

SAN FRANCISCO: Rates of chlamydia and syphilis — two of the most common sexually transmitted

infections in the United States — plummeted in one key demographic after patients were offered a widely prescribed antibiotic after sex. found that incidence of syphilis and chlamydia fell dramatically among gay and bisexual men and transgender women after patients were offered doxy-PEP, short for doxycycline post-exposure prophylaxis (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

TEXAS: A team at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio found females aged 40 to 54 years are at higher risk for long COVID. The researchers evaluated 12,276 individuals. Among participants aged 40 to 54 years, a trend toward higher risk was seen in menopausal and non-menopausal females versus males (*JAMA Network Open*).

AMERICA: A study found that the rates of patients leaving an ER before medically advised increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 721 million emergency department visits from 2016 to 2021, of which 194 million (26.9%) occurred after March 2020. Patients left before medically advised in 5.9 million emergency department visits during the study period - a 53.6% increase over pre-pandemic levels (*American Journal of Emergency Medicine*).

UGANDA: The head of the World Health Organization’s health emergencies program said six people who were in contact with Uganda’s latest Ebola case have become ill, though it’s not yet clear if they too are suffering from the dangerous viral disease. One is the wife of the patient, who died, and several others are health workers (*Stat*).

AMERICA: Researchers at the Univ of Minnesota and Boston University looked at the death rates between 1999-2023. But the death rates for adults aged 25-44 had a sharp increase during the COVID-19 pandemic and remained “higher than expected” after the pandemic. The death rates for early adults in 2023 were about 70% higher than they could have been if the death

rates hadn’t started to increase 10 years before the pandemic (*KMSP-TV*).

AMERICA: A new GAO report identifies a shortage of public health workers across multiple occupations and locations that restricts the ability to perform essential functions such as disease investigation and mitigation, hazard detection, and emergency response. HHS and other organizations have taken actions (eg, job training and placement, better pay) to alleviate the shortages, which began with the 2008-2009 recession and worsened during public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic (*CIDRAP*).

AMERICA: US poultry farms saw no let-up in H5N1 avian flu detections with more outbreaks reported from eight states, according to the latest confirmations from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). In California, outbreaks hit two more commercial duck farms, one in Madera County and the other in Merced County, affecting about 157,000 birds. (*CIDRAP*).

THE PENTAGON: Thousands of Marines who were separated from the military for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine got messages from the service informing them of Jan. 27 executive order, seeking to reinstate them into the armed forces with their previous rank and backpay. But specifics were not clear. Despite the messages the Marine Corps could not answer questions related to what type of service obligation those troops might incur if they decide to come back (*Military.com*).

COVID-19, 02/02/2025
World Total Cases 777,335,228
World Total Deaths 7,084,023
U.S. Total Deaths 1,212,505
World Health Organization

Get Vaxed! COVID is Deadly And Still Killing People

There have been 2,861 reported COVID-19 deaths in the world this year (through Jan 31) with the U.S. making up about 2,100 of those deaths.

Hospitalizations and ER visits are also on the rise,

Despite five years of research developments, treatments and diagnostic tests, experts say COVID-19 will always be around, with two peaks each year — one in the summer and one in winter.

The thousands of deaths and rise in hospitalizations will not decrease until more people take advantage of getting vaccinated,” said Dr William Schaffner of Vanderbilt University.

ABC News, 01/31/2025

Standard Precautions Work Mpx Didn't Spread

In 2023, a CNA worked three shifts while infectious with mpox, exposing as many as 56 residents to the virus.

But despite the widespread exposure, residents in that Kentucky nursing home did not contract mpox.

At 21 days after the last day of possible exposure, no residents had experienced fever or skin lesions consistent with mpox, and temperature and skin checks were discontinued.

Vaccination likely did not play a significant a role in limiting spread. Rather, close adherence to glove-wearing and other standard precautions likely protected residents.

The nursing assistant fully recovered.

American Journal of Infection Control, 02/2025

Couple Pleads Guilty In \$1.2B Skin Fraud

An Arizona couple, Alexandra Gehrke, 39, and husband Jeffrey King, 46, has pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud and wire fraud for a \$1.2 billion scheme that targeted seniors in skilled nursing facilities and other healthcare settings, persuading

them to receive expensive and unnecessary wound care.

The medically untrained pair contracted faulty sales representatives to “locate elderly patients, including hospice patients, who had wounds at any stage and order amniotic wound grafts from a specific graft distributor.”

Kickbacks totaling \$279 million were paid to the sales reps based on size and quantity of grafts sold.

DOJ, 01/31/2025

Has Time 'Run Out' For CT's Last Public Nursing Home

The Nathaniel Witherell skilled nursing facility has been owned and operated by the town of Greenwich, CT, for more than a century, but its recent history has been tarnished by massive debt and the continual threat of closure.

The Witherell lost roughly \$51 million over the last decade.

Now, town officials are revisiting the idea of selling or closing its doors, 122 years after they first opened.

The 202-bed SNF is the last municipally run nursing home in the state, and according to city leaders is a major source of financial pain for Greenwich.

McKnight's, 01/24/2025

Geriatricians Are Mostly Absent from Nursing Homes

Remarkably few nursing homes patients see geriatricians, even though they're among the physicians most likely to spend the majority of their workday in long-term care facilities.

Across more than 14,000 physicians treating Medicare patients in nursing homes, geriatricians managed just 4% of cases from 2012 to 2019.

Internal medicine specialists, meanwhile, accounted for 47%, and family practitioners cared for 43%.

Although fewer geriatricians provide care in nursing homes, our findings show that they dedicate the highest proportion [63.8%] of their services to nursing home residents.

JAMDA, 01/31/2025

ONE COLUMN

Researchers Find Personal Needs Allowance Lacking for Many Residents

Federal regulators should push states to increase personal needs allowances provided to nursing home residents covered by Medicaid.

policy researchers argue in a new *JAMA Health* viewpoint that payments — which can be used to cover personal expenses ranging from fuzzy socks to telephones — have remained stagnant or lagged for below the rate of inflation for decades in many states. The strain on residents often spills over onto the staff who care for them.

“The personal needs allowance is so important because it represents the main source of income for residents: personal expenses such as clothing, shoes, cell phone bills, haircuts, and small comforts like snacks and preferred toiletries,” co-author Monica Aswani, DrPH, assistant health services professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said.

Alaska has the highest allowance at \$200 per month, followed by Florida (\$160) and Nevada (\$154). On the other end of the spectrum, South Carolina and Alabama were right at the federal minimum, and several other states weren't far from it, including California (\$35) and Louisiana (\$38).

Aswani and co-author Paul Shafer of Boston University's School of Public Health, found that the average allowances in 2001 and 2024 were \$43 and \$70 per month, respectively. But with the federal floor sitting at \$30 per month since 1987, along with current inflation, some residents are living in states where their money is worth less now than 40 years ago.

“Increasing the federal allowance floor to reflect the personal expenses of nursing home residents today and indexing it to inflation are important next steps. Nursing home residents should be able to retain enough of their own income to cover basic needs so that they can age with dignity.”

JAMA Health , McKnight's, 01/07/2025

New Programs Tackle Administrator Shortages

A recent survey revealed that 14.5% of providers reported top-level or executive vacancies in addition to a 28% turnover rate in the administrator ranks.

In direct response to that, an Oklahoma group has developed a 19-week training program aimed at creating the next generation of nursing home leaders.

It's not a new concept. Several states have proposed administrator-in-training programs.

Iowa, for example, has a bill pending bill for a pilot program allowing AITs to work for two years while pursuing their formal certification. Facilities could be reimbursed up to \$40,000 of salary over that period.

McKnight's, 01/17/2025

15 Years Later State Has Not Funded Staffing Plan

The issue of a 15-year-old program created to combat a state's massive nursing home worker turnover rates has flared again.

Iowa's Pay for Performance program was intended to recognize nursing facilities that provide quality care. But the momentum behind the idea seemed to have peaked with its creation in 2009.

"The legislature did not provide funding for the program in 2010 and has not funded the program since that time," a report from Iowa's Health and Human Services noted.

CNAs had an attrition rate of 77% in 2024, while turnover rates for RNs and LPNs were 66% and 68%, respectively.

Iowa Capital Dispatch, 02/06/2025

Lack of Information Would Affect Infection Control

Late last week, the CDC used the Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory to urge infection preventionists and clinical laboratories to expedite influenza A subtyping, to "help prevent delays in identifying

human infections with avian influenza A(H5N1) viruses.

Nursing homes are required by CMS to implement all public health infection prevention and control recommendations. "Therefore," said infection preventionist Buffy Lloyd-Krejci, "if they do not have current and updated access to the recommendations, then they will not know what to implement."

"This could impact the overall safety of their communal environment including visitors, healthcare workers, and residents."

McKnight's, 01/23/2025

DEA Proposes Telehealth Prescribing Registry

The US Drug Enforcement Administration has proposed a rule that would subject long-term care providers who prescribe controlled substances via telehealth to a tiered registration system.

DEA said the rule would "provide heightened prescription, recordkeeping, and reporting requirements."

The planned proposal comes two months after the agency issued a final rule giving operators a third extension of COVID-era telehealth benefits.

McKnight's, 01/17/2025

Another Warning About Funding and Closing Doors

Some nursing homes in New York may be forced to close their doors without an increase in Medicaid funding, a dire warning as the state legislature starts its budget hearings.

Joe Murabito, owner of Elemental Management Group, reminded state leaders that facilities in Oswego County are dealing with reimbursement rates of \$200 a day or less.

Dividing \$200 by 24 hours in a day, that's \$8.34 an hour that nursing homes are expected to deliver around the clock, oftentimes high acuity care.

Skilled Nursing News, 02/04/2025

Briefly in the News

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. The American Heart Association (AHA) report found that 941,652 Americans died from cardiovascular disease in 2022, the most recent year for which data is available. That's an increase of more than 10,000 from the just over 931,500 reported to have died from cardiovascular disease the previous year (*Circulation*).

In 2020, consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages caused an estimated 2.2 million new cases of Type 2 diabetes globally. Researchers assessed data from 184 countries to estimate global cases of Type 2 diabetes attributable to sugar-sweetened beverage intake. In addition to cases of Type 2 diabetes, researchers estimated that 1.2 million new cases of cardiovascular disease were caused by drinking such beverages (*Nature Medicine*).

Healthcare supply chain costs are expected to rise 2.3% from July 2025 to June 2026, according to a Jan. 28 Vizient's "Winter 2025 Spend Management Outlook." The predicted increase would be driven by sustained high prices for raw materials, freight and shipping costs and the effects of tariffs on medical-surgical products manufactured in China, according to a news release from the healthcare performance improvement company. (Murphy, 1/28)

A coalition of around 20,000 advocates and twelve major health care groups has called on CMS to expand Medicare and Medicaid to include FDA-approved anti-obesity medications. Led by the Health Equity Coalition for Chronic Disease, they say the change would potentially benefit up to 7.5 million Americans (*Newsweek*).

Lawmakers in Florida and Pennsylvania have proposed so-called "granny cam" law early in the legislative sessions. In Rhodelsland a new law allowing video monitoring in resident rooms is about to go into effect. At least 16 others that already have "granny cam" laws (*McKnight's*).