

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT

"This difficult decision follows extensive efforts to sustain operations despite financial challenges, including low Medicaid reimbursement rates, rising costs of care and ongoing staffing shortages"

statement from St. John's Penfield (NY) Green House Homes on its impending closing

"As a state, we have to do a much better job of vetting owners, getting through intentionally opaque ownership structures and understanding who is really making the decisions for the nursing home"

NJ Comptroller Kevin Walsh after four SNFs were disqualified from Medicaid

"It's just delaying patient care for no good reason" Lauren Wilson, a Missoula pediatrician and past president of the Montana chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics on prior authorizations

As Expected, Senate 'Thumbs Up' Kennedy

The Senate approved Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as HHS secretary, despite some misgivings about his understanding of the Medicare and Medicaid programs he'll be tasked with overseeing and his controversial position on vaccines.

In a largely party-line vote, 52-48, Kennedy became the nation's top health official and will oversee 13 agencies, including the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

The appointment comes as Republicans begin considering major budget cuts that are expected to hit government healthcare programs significantly. House Republicans are eyeing \$1.5 to \$2 trillion in cuts, putting Medicaid expansion and other funding in the crosshairs.

McKnight's, 02/14/2025

House GOP Eying Big Cuts in Medicaid and SNAP

House Republicans unveiled a broad outline of their plans for the federal budget, using cuts to social programs to help pay for trillions of dollars in tax cuts.

The outline indicates Republicans are planning \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts over ten years. Spending cuts would offset only part of that cost.

The document doesn't specify exactly what programs to cut. But analysts say the implication is that Republicans are looking for deep reductions in programs like Medicaid and SNAP, given the GOP ruling out cuts to Medicare or Social Security.

Huffpost, 02/12/2025

Slashing Medicaid Rates Could Seriously Affect SNFs

Republican lawmakers are considering various cuts to Medicaid to offset spending on Trump administration priorities, such as border security and extending tax credits.

While Congress could pass caps on Medicaid spending, slash block grants or create work requirements to push people off the rolls, some policymakers are advocating reducing the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage paid to states.

That would force states to decide exactly where to cut their Medicaid spending. Some states would be forced to walk back Medicaid expansion, but they could also lower rates they pay for skilled nursing and assisted living.

McKnight's, 02/12/2025

Montana Looking To Regulate Prior Authorizations

This month, a Democratic and a Republican lawmaker introduced or were drafting separate bills restricting health insurers' ability to require prior authorization for certain treatments and medications.

Many of the state's medical providers are behind the effort, saying prior authorization is denying vital care and needlessly sucking up more and more of their time, which they say could be better spent with patients.

Montana health insurers, however, insist they are authorizing drugs and treatments that are shown to be needed. If their review power is stripped away, costs will continue to increase due to insurance paying for unnecessary treatments,

KFF Health News, 02/13/2025

Private Equity Firms = Lop-sided Bankruptcies

Private equity has played a disproportionately large role in U.S. bankruptcies in 2024, with startling economic implications.

Although private equity accounts for 6.5% of the U.S. economy according to the primary lobby group for the industry, it was responsible for 56% of the largest bankruptcies.

In addition, private equity was overrepresented in healthcare bankruptcies, accounting for 7 of the 8 largest healthcare-related bankruptcies of the year, and 21% of all healthcare bankruptcies.

Focusing on immediate financial gains can lead to significant mismanagement and economic instability, contributing to higher bankruptcy rates among private equity-owned firms.

Private Equity Stakeholder Project, 02/12/2025

Canned Inspector Generals Fighting Back

Eight of the 19 inspectors general whom Donald Trump fired from their federal agency watchdog posts are suing for their jobs back.

They say that Trump shouldn't have been able to fire them in late January without first notifying Congress and that the White House ignored regulations around their removal that existed to protect them from political interference and retribution.

The lawsuit states, the administration's "actions have inflicted substantial damage on the critical oversight ethos of transparency, truth-telling without fear or favor, and respect for the rule of law."

HHS OIG Christi Grimm is among those fired.

CNN, 02/12/2025

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

WASHINGTON, D.C.: The Trump administration is pushing HHS to go after “anything related to COVID” and contracts that would “be deemed wasteful by an average citizen if made public,” according to an email sent to FDA staff. That includes General Services Administration contracts for services to support diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility offices, telework, swag or advertising spending, the memo said. Staff were asked to report data back on such wasteful spending (*Bloomberg*).

AMERICA: The National Institutes of Health is at a crossroads with the RECOVER Initiative, its flagship program to address long COVID. Designed to provide answers and treatments for the millions suffering from long-term infection, the initiative has already received significant criticism for failing to prioritize the needs of patients and advance meaningful clinical trials. Now, as Congress and others call for the inclusion of myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) within the RECOVER framework, NIH has an historic opportunity to transform post-viral illness research. (*Stat*).

CALIFORNIA: Following the deadly wildfires that ravaged communities in Los Angeles several local and state officials are calling for federal action to protect families against dangerous pollutants. U.S. Representatives Judy Chu, Laura Friedman, Brad Sherman, Pasadena Vice Mayor Jess Rivas and Pasadena Public Health Director Manuel Carmona asked for the creation of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency task force to regularly monitor air quality in the LA area (*CBS News*).

WASHINGTON state: The Spokane Regional Health District has had Washington state's first pertussis (whooping cough) death since 2011, which involved a child younger than 5 years old who died in November 2024. The death was recently confirmed by the CDC, which in early January warned that cases in 2024 were higher than levels seen before the COVID pandemic (*CIDRAP*).

TEXAS: Nearly 30% of cats and dogs belonging to COVID-infected patients in central Texas tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, signaling previous infection. In a study, of 579 pets from 281 households, 19 of 396 dogs (4.8%) and 21 out of 157 cats (13.4%) tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 from 2020 to 2021 (*bioRxiv*).

AMERICA: This winter's COVID wave in the U.S. has been the gentlest to date – a welcome reprieve. According to wastewater data aggregated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, not only was there less Covid circulating over the holidays than in previous years, but there was also less virus in the wastewater than in all the summer waves the program has tracked (*The New York Times*).

SOUTH AMERICA: Yellow fever infections are on the rise in several South Americas countries. The increased cases began at the end of 2024 and continued into the first weeks of 2025, with 61 cases reported in 2024, 30 of them fatal. PAHO said that, in 2024, cases were mainly reported from the Amazon region of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, and Peru (*Pan American Health Organization*).

NORTH AMERICA: About two million baked goods were recalled over concerns of potential contamination with the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. The manufacturer FGF Brands, which distributes baked goods in the U.S. and Canada, issued the voluntary recall because of the “potential for contamination.” (*New York Times*).

AMERICA: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or H5N1, can be fatal to birds. Waterfowl and aquatic birds are most at risk, along with raptors that eat bird carcasses. Avian flu has also spread to dairy cows, with around 950 infected herds reported nationwide. Most worryingly, there have been 67 reported human cases and one death almost all of them among people exposed to infected birds or cattle. (*The Boston Globe*).

THE CARIBBEAN: A gastrointestinal illness broke out on the *Radiance of the Seas* cruise ship. Some 89 of the 2,164 passengers onboard were affected by the outbreak on the Royal Caribbean International ship. That's around 4.1% of the passengers. Only two of the 910 crew members have reported symptoms (*CDC*).

TEXAS/ NEW MEXICO: an outbreak of measles in West Texas has expanded, and a new case was confirmed in nearby New Mexico. The Texas has identified 24 measles cases in connection with the onset of symptoms within the last two weeks. ... In New Mexico, residents were alerted to the measles infection of an unvaccinated teenager, as well as the possible exposure of more people in a hospital emergency room and sixth grade school gymnasium (*AP*).

WASHINGTON, D.C.: The Trump administration has chosen Gerald Parker, a veterinarian and former top US health and security official, to lead the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy. Parker's career includes more than three decades in the federal government focusing on global health, national security and pandemic preparedness. (*Bloomberg*).

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*).

COVID-19, 02/13/2025

World Total Cases
777,334,085

World Total Deaths
7,086,633

U.S. Total Deaths
1,215,005

World Health Organization

The Flu Overtakes COVID in Deaths and Hospitalizations

For the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, more people in the U.S. died of Influenza than from COVID-19 in the week ending on Jan. 25.

Influenza hospitalizations are more than three times higher than COVID-19 hospitalizations amid this season's record wave of flu infections.

In 22 states, the rate of influenza deaths has been outpacing COVID-19 deaths throughout the first five weeks of 2025.

The gap between flu and COVID-19 deaths is biggest in California, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon and Wyoming, where the percentage of weekly deaths from flu are at least double those from COVID-19.

CBS News, 02/11/2025

Americans Say the Pandemic Drove Them Apart

A new Pew Research Center poll shows 72% of Americans said the pandemic did more to divide the country than bring it together, with 75% saying COVID-19 took a toll on their own lives.

The poll was conducted in October 2024 with 9,593 respondents.

It suggests that, 5 years after the pandemic was officially declared in 2020, the nation has not yet healed from the societal effects of COVID-19 with Americans citing the once-in-decades event as an accelerator of the political divide between the left and the right, the distrust of government institutions, and the rise of disinformation

CIDRAP, 02/14/2025

Top NIH Official Suddenly Resigns

The No. 2 official at the National Institutes of Health abruptly resigned and retired from government service on Tuesday,

another sign that the Trump administration is reshaping the nation's public health and biomedical research institutions.

The official, Dr. Lawrence A. Tabak, a dentist and researcher, was long

considered a steadying force and had weathered past presidential transitions.

One person familiar with the decision said Dr. Tabak had been confronted with a reassignment that he viewed as unacceptable.

The New York Times, 02/12/2025

Watch Out! The Antipsychotic 'Gotcha' is on the Way

Thirty-five years after federal officials first narrowed in on the use of "chemical restraints" in nursing homes.

Revisions in the new surveyor guidance focus heavily on antipsychotics and schizophrenia diagnoses that have already been in a compliance spotlight in recent years.

With each additional set of revisions, said independent regulatory consultant Bill Vaughn, skilled nursing providers and clinicians must jump through additional hoops to ensure they're not cited for compliance.

"We're at a place now where it appears that before you order a psychotropic drug, you must, under all conditions, try behavioral intervention."

McKnight's, 02/12/2025

Heads May Roll at HHS – Probably 'New Heads'

Recent reports have described a process in which HHS leaders have been asked to identify all probationary employees — meaning those new and easier to fire in the federal system — as mission-critical, important and not mission-critical.

Cuts to the agency's workforce could impact skilled nursing providers in multiple ways, depending on who receives pink slips.

In addition to drafting and revising rules by which nursing homes must operate, CMS staff participate in and monitor nursing home inspections, ensure the accuracy of public-facing quality measures, and provide education and support, both directly to nursing homes and to surveyors.

McKnight's, 02/12/2025

ONE COLUMN

It Was on Facebook So It Must Be True – NOT!

Recent Facebook posts claimed that Pfizer had "just released" a list of side effects associated with its COVID-19 vaccine. These posts shared a list of approximately 40 to 50 medical conditions purportedly linked to the vaccine, including epileptic psychosis, and stillbirth

The claim is both inaccurate and misleading. First, it isn't new, nor did Pfizer "just release" it.

A similar list appeared in a 2023 article by the Argentinian outlet *El Cronista*, which cited a 2022 article from *The South African*. These articles claimed that Pfizer provided a list of over 1,200 potential vaccine-related side effects to the FDA.

However, investigations by *Reuters* in 2022 and *AFP* in 2023 debunked this allegation. A *Science Feedback* in 2022 also found it misleading. Thus, the 2025 posts merely recycled a previously refuted claim without providing any new information.

Second, the list submitted to the FDA described medical conditions reported in the first three months following vaccine authorization among vaccinated individuals, but doesn't imply the vaccine caused these events. The use of the term "side effects" in these claims is misleading, as it implies a causal relationship that hasn't been established.

The list originates from a Pfizer document submitted to the FDA in early 2021 as part of the company's Biologics License Application for COVID-19 vaccine approval.

This document includes Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI) gathered from health agencies across 63 countries, including the United States.

The *Reuters* review highlighted that these adverse events were collected from national While these systems are critical for monitoring vaccine safety, they can't be used alone to establish a causal link between vaccination and reported medical conditions.

Snopes, 01/17/2025

NJ Kicks Four SNFs Out Of Medicaid Program

The owners of four New Jersey SNFs have been barred from the state's Medicaid program, a consequence of the state comptroller's continued focus on uncovering and punishing Medicaid fraud.

Kevin Breslin and the six other owners of Atrium Health and Senior Living were notified by the State that they and four facilities they own have been disqualified from receiving state Medicaid funds.

The decision came after Breslin pleaded guilty to federal healthcare fraud and tax conspiracy charges last year in relation to a complex scheme in which the government said investors were paid but staff and vendors were not.

McKnight's, 02/12/2025

Don't See this Very Often – A Green House is Closing

A nursing home designed using the Green House model is closing due to fiscal challenges.

St. John's Home announced its Penfield, NY, Green House Homes community will shut down. Company officials said they are working with the state to transfer residents to alternative locations.

It's not clear when the facilities will close.

The Penfield Green House Homes is one of 411 Green House sites across the country. The Green House Project has partnered with more than 80 organizations in 33 states and also has eight locations in Australia and two in Canada.

WROC-TV, 02/06/2025

Not-For-Profit CCRC Operator Files For Bankruptcy

Lutheran Life Communities has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to try to ensure uninterrupted resident services at its continuing care retirement communities and to reorganize the company, according to court filings.

The resolution indicated the company "has been investigating strategic alternatives" to its financial problems to avoid the appointment of a receiver.

Lutheran Life Communities, part of the Lutheran Life Ministries system, operates Three CCRCs in Illinois and one in Indiana.

As of Jan. 31, the communities housed a total of 825 residents.

Senior Living, 02/10/2025

Judge Orders Restoration Of Federal Health Websites

A federal judge has ordered federal health agencies to restore websites and datasets that were abruptly pulled down beginning in late January, prompting an outcry from medical and public health communities.

The temporary restraining order was granted in response to a lawsuit filed against the federal government by Doctors for America (DFA), a progressive advocacy group representing physicians, and the nonprofit Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy group.

The sudden loss of websites prompted a mad rush in the scientific community to download and archive data.

McKnight's, 02/11/2025

Judge Opens Federal Money Spicket – Includes LTC Funds

A federal judge narrowed a restraining order and allowed more career federal officials and leaders to access sensitive payment systems housed at the Treasury Department.

The order, had been preventing the Trump administration from reviewing payments managed by the Bureau of the Fiscal Services, which is responsible for about 90% of government payments, or \$5.4 trillion in spending in 2023.

State officials sued last week to block the new Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) from examining or gaining control of critical information systems, including the system managing healthcare payment to CMS.

McKnight's, 02/12/2025

Briefly in the News

Doctors and some bipartisan allies on Capitol Hill advanced their campaign to boost Medicare physician reimbursements with the release of new legislation. The Medicare Patient Access and Practice Stabilization Act of 2025 would give doctors a 6.6% rate increase through 2026 and be retroactive to the beginning of this year, when a 2.9% cut took effect (**Modern Healthcare**).

Genworth Financial, one of the largest providers of long-term care insurance in the U.S. ties its executive compensation to its ability to obtain annual price increases from policyholders. Thomas McNerney, the company's CEO, received more than \$9.8 million in compensation in 2023, including \$3.2 million in incentive pay, a portion of which was directly linked to the company's success in increasing rates for long-term care insurance (**CT Mirror**).

Baystate Health has eliminated 98 corporate positions, or less than 1% of its workforce, as part of a larger cost-cutting initiative. The Springfield Massachusetts-based system also eliminated 134 leadership roles in November as part of an overall six-year, \$1.2 billion investment plan. In both rounds of job cuts, some of the affected positions were vacant (**Modern Healthcare**).

Users who search for abortion information on the CDC website are now directed to try searching for the word "adoption." The change comes less than a week after more than a dozen federal agency websites — including the CDC's — went offline. Some of the CDC's webpages have since been restored, but scientists and public health researchers are concerned that the information that has come back has been altered in some way (**The Hill**).

A veteran apparently committed suicide Jan. 27 in the parking garage at the VA Medical Center in Syracuse, New York. A witness said the veteran died by suicide wearing a body-length pink, light blue and white flag -- a symbol of transgender pride. Syracuse.com said the veteran was a patient who had been discharged from the hospital's inpatient facility on Jan. 21 (**Military.com**).