

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT

"Whether the pandemic ended or not is an intellectual debate" clinical epidemiologist and long COVID researcher Ziyad Al-Aly of Washington University in St. Louis.

"We should strengthen Medicare by improving it and expanding access to it, not weaken it through further privatization" Eagan Kemp, a health care policy advocate at Public Citizen

"When I was completing my fellowship in the New York area back in the 1980s, the attending physicians said to me, 'You will never see a case of measles.' And so, I thought at that time that we were never going to see measles, but we ended up seeing it" Dial Hewlett Jr., M.D., medical director of tuberculosis services at the Westchester County Department of Health,

Can't Tell the Players Without a Scorecard!!

The person the White House identified last month as the leader of DOGE — despite public evidence that Elon Musk is calling the shots — has been working simultaneously at the Department of Health and Human Services since February.

The filing shows that Amy Gleason, despite claiming responsibility as DOGE's leader, was detailed to HHS last month and formally hired by the department as a "consultant/expert" on March 4.

She has retained her status as a DOGE employee as well.

Polittico, 03/18/2025

Indy Hospitals Siphon Billions Away From SNFs

County-owned hospitals in Indiana have diverted away more than \$2.5 billion in Medicaid money intended to provide care at nursing homes. The move leaves sick and elderly residents to languish in some of the most poorly staffed facilities in America.

The new information shows 21 public hospitals kept about 46% of \$5.6 billion in supplemental Medicaid payments generated by roughly 500 nursing homes they acquired over the past 15 years.

The data, acquired by the IndyStar, reveals the fullest picture yet of a secretive financing scheme that Indiana relies on to prop up its public hospitals.

Indianapolis Star, 03/18/2025

State Considers Its Own Nursing Home Staffing Rule

Missouri has a handful of proposed bills on the table aimed directly at long-term care facilities, including legislation to improve the state's SNF staffing levels.

The most prominent bill in question appears to mirror the federal staffing mandate issued by the Biden-era CMS.

The legislation maps out staffing requirements for nursing homes and also would increase oversight of facility ownership.

Providers argue penalizing facilities for not hiring nurses that are largely unavailable due to hiring and retention challenges is counterproductive.

But VOYCE, a long-term care resident advocacy group, favors the measure which, they say, makes adequate resident care non-negotiable.

McKnight's, 03/20/2025

14 SNF Bills Intro'ed None Will Likely Pass

Iowa Democratic State Senator Claire Celsi last week introduced fourteen separate bills dealing with nursing homes.

Celsi acknowledged that since the GOP controls both the House and Senate, it will be difficult to have the bills passed.

The bills cover such things as "grannie cams," more ombudsmen, and the state would be prohibited from approving any SNF sales to a private equity firm or R.E.I.T.

One bill increases the penalties imposed for certain regulatory violations and would prohibit any Medicaid-certified home in Iowa from requiring residents or their families to agree to arbitration.

Bleeding Heartland, 03/09/2025

NJ County Nursing Home May Go on the Block

Meadowview Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Northfield, New Jersey is owned and operated by Atlantic County. The facility, one of only three county homes left in New Jersey, is losing about \$5 million a year.

The current economic realities make that an unsustainable reality in the long run.

Meadowview has an 30-bed Veterans Wing, a vital part of the 180-bed skilled nursing facility but a proposal to become a Veterans Home was declined by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The county must now consider other options, including selling the facility.

WENJ-FM, 03/11/2025

Cost of LTC Up More Than Inflation

The cost of long-term care services increased above inflation across all care types last year.

The national annual median cost of a semi-private room in a nursing home rose to \$111,325, an increase of 7%, and the cost of a private room in a nursing home expanded by 9% to \$127

Assisted living community costs increased to an annual national median cost of \$70,800 per year.

The report noted that assisted living occupancy rates also increased year over year, from 77% to 84%, "which may be pressuring supply and driving higher rates."

2024 Cost of Care Survey, 2024

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

AMERICA: The 2020s have inarguably been COVID-19's decade. Since the coronavirus outbreak was acknowledged as a pandemic exactly five years ago, the pandemic has killed well over 1 million Americans, derailed the global economy, and sparked political upheaval that continues today. It also yielded what many hail as the greatest scientific accomplishment in human history: the development of effective vaccines in under a year. Yet in dominating the early 2020s, Covid-19 also distracted from what is arguably a more significant public health emergency. Even at the height of the pandemic, more young Americans died of drug overdose than COVID. **(STAT)**

THE WHITE HOUSE: The Trump administration has not staffed an office established by Congress to prepare the nation for future pandemics, The White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy was established by Congress in 2022 in response to mistakes that led to a flat-footed response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The office, called OPRP, once had a staff of about 20 people and was orchestrating the country's response to bird flu and other threats until January 20, including hosting regular interagency meetings to share plans **(CNN)**.

THE WORLD: Five years after Covid-19 shut down activities all over the world, medical historians sometimes struggle to place the pandemic in context. What, they are asking, should this ongoing viral threat be compared with? Is COVID like the 1918 flu, terrifying when it was raging but soon relegated to the status of a long-ago nightmare? Stay tuned **(The New York Times)**.

TEXAS: The number of measles cases associated with an outbreak in western Texas has grown to 321 Almost all of the cases are in unvaccinated individuals or in individuals whose vaccination status is unknown. Only two cases have occurred in persons vaccinated with two doses. The measles vaccine provides up to 97% protection after 2 doses **(ABC News)**.

TEXAS/N. MEX/OKLA: Three hundred and twenty-one (321) cases have been reported in the ongoing measles outbreak in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, Meanwhile, a public health leader in that area opined the outbreak may take a year to run its course **(CNN, Stat)**.

CALIFORNIA: Tuolumne County Public Health officials warned of two measles exposures at a high school and an emergency room. Health officials said the two cases are from the same household and stem from traveling internationally. Their vaccination status is unknown **(CBS News)**.

AMERICA: Annually over 135 million passengers traveled to the U.S. from other countries. To infectious disease experts, that represents 135 million chances for an outbreak to begin. To identify and stop the next potential pandemic, government disease detectives have been discreetly searching for viral pathogens in wastewater from airplanes, looking for pathogens that may have hitched a ride with passengers on long-haul international flights **(CBS News)**.

AMERICA: In a recent Gallup survey Americans' views of their mental and physical health are at the lowest point in nearly 25 years, a downturn that accelerated at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued since. The poll found that some three-quarters of Americans said their mental health (at 75%) and physical health (at 76%) were "excellent" or "good" **(The Hill)**.

AMERICA: COVID-19 put public health officials on the front lines against a once-in-a-lifetime threat and it's left them with less power and resources to respond to future emergencies. Instead of strengthening America's public health infrastructure, the pandemic experience spawned hundreds of new laws in at least 24 states limiting public health orders or otherwise undercutting emergency responses **(Axios)**.

THE WORLD: A new study suggests that kids who develop MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children), a

severe complication following COVID-19 infections, may do so because COVID reactivates a latent Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) in their bodies **(Nature)**.

WASHINGTON, D.C: Some current and past members of an FDA advisory committee felt snubbed when the agency went ahead and made decisions about influenza strain selection for next season without them. The FDA's decision to abruptly cancel the March 13 meeting-- and instead hold a meeting on that date with representatives from the CDC, FDA, and the DOD -- "is very unfortunate," said Tina Tan, MD, of Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. **(MedPage Today)**.

THE WORLD: On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Whether it still is depends on who you ask. There are no clear criteria to mark the end of a pandemic, and the virus that causes the disease – SARS-CoV-2 – continues evolving and infecting people worldwide. Long COVID researcher Ziyad Al-Aly of Washington University in St. Louis said. "For the family that lost a loved one a week ago in the ICU, that threat is real. That pain is real. That loss is real" **(Science News)**.

WASHINGTON, D.C: Struggling to contain a raging measles epidemic in West Texas, public health officials increasingly worry that residents are relying on unproven remedies endorsed by HHS Sec. Robert F. Kennedy Jr and postponing doctor visits until the illness has worsened. Hospitals and officials sounded an alarm this week, issuing a notice explaining which measles symptoms warranted immediate medical attention and stressing the importance of timely treatment **(New York Times)**.

COVID-19, 03/20/2025

World Total Cases
777,594,331

World Total Deaths
7,089,989

U.S. Total Deaths
1,219,038

World Health Organization

Defeat of CDC Nominee Tests RFK, Jr's Vax Agenda

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s failure to install a fellow vaccine critic to a key government post is testing the limits of how far the US health secretary can go to promote his public-health agenda.

The White House informed Dave Weldon that officials were pulling his nomination to lead the CDC after his views on vaccines alarmed key Republican senators.

Weldon had been scheduled to attend a Senate hearing last week, but Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana said, "there were not the votes to confirm the nominee."

Bloomberg, 03/14/2025

Surprise! Surprise! Surprise! DOL Appeals OT Rule

In what was a surprise move, the Department of Labor has filed an appeal to a federal court ruling that blocked enforcement of the federal government's overtime rule.

The overtime rule would increase the salary thresholds necessary to exempt a salaried top-level employee from federal overtime pay.

The April 2024 final rule called for updating the current annual salary threshold for overtime pay eligibility from \$35,568 to \$58,656.

In November a federal court ruled that the Labor Department exceeded its authority in increasing the minimum salary for exemption.

Senior Living, 03/11/2025

WV to Turn Over Operation of Vets Home to Pvt Company

The West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance is in the process of contracting a private company to operate its Veterans Nursing Facility in Clarksburg.

Kennedy said the cost of the facility's operation has become prohibitive, largely due to the need to utilize contracted nurses.

Because of state rules, the facility is unable to pay a competitive enough salary to retain directly employed nurses, which

is why the department must use agency nurses.

Contracting the entire facility's operation would put the financial onus on the management company. The company would hire its own employees.

WV News, 03/10/2025

California Takes Big Loan to Save M'caid

California lawmakers are calling for answers after Gov. Gavin Newsom surprised them by floating a loan to bail out the state's Medicaid program, bringing renewed scrutiny on the state's coverage of undocumented immigrants.

The \$3.44 billion loan will cover obligations for the state program, known as Medi-Cal, through March, but it's raising questions about a bigger budget hole that may need to be filled later on.

It's especially a concern for the state as Congress eyes dramatic cuts from Medicaid that could eat into California's funds, and as leading figures in Washington like Elon Musk slam the state's undocumented coverage.

Politico, 03/13/2025

Huge Increase Coming In Parkinson's Disease

By 2050 there will be an estimated 25.2 million people living with Parkinson's disease worldwide – a 112% increase since 2021. The WHO estimates 8.5 million people worldwide were living with the disease in 2019.

Meanwhile an artificial intelligence (AI)-based algorithm differentiated various forms of Parkinson's syndrome.

Experts said the study is "a game changer" for using a common MRI scan to differentiate Parkinson's disease, multiple system atrophy and PSP - progressive supranuclear palsy.

The method was tested on a 21-center NIH and Parkinson's study group and was simple, fast accurate and effective when applied on many different types of MRI scanners.

MedPage Today, BMJ, 03/18/2025

ONE COLUMN

SNFs & Health Depts Team Up on Emergency Prep

Skilled nursing facilities are teaming up with state public health organizations for assistance in creating and enacting emergency preparedness plans that help them steer clear of or overcome various disasters.

Effectively addressing public health emergencies would enable SNFs to reverse a trend that indicates many nursing homes are seriously un-prepared to respond to or manage resident and staff safety during an emergency.

A recent OIG report found that 77% of nursing homes in high-risk areas experienced at least one challenge while responding to an emergency event. And those that reported a challenge - such as troubles with infection prevention plans during an emergency or securing beds for evacuated residents - had lower community resilience when stacked up against nursing homes that did not report challenges.

Virginia, for example, is one of the states looking to turn that around, with local health officials entering quality collaborations with SNFs.

The Fairfax County Health Department has been hosting an annual Skilled Nursing Facility Symposium since 2018 to help local healthcare professionals collaborate, share best practices and enhance their infection prevention and control skills.

In Michigan, the Moving Forward Nursing Home Quality Coalition received a \$500,000 grant last year from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, which they're using to train state nursing homes leadership staff members on proper procedures when facing disaster.

The state isn't preparing SNFs just for infectious outbreaks, the Coalition's Chair Alice Bonner said, but also for hurricanes, floods, blizzards, cyber attacks and other risks.

"The goal is to educate and prepare nursing homes [to then] share that experience with other nursing homes and public health agencies in their regions."

McKnight's, 02/24/2025

Missouri SNF Dodges HHS Bullet – for Now

Liberty Health and Wellness, a nursing home in Liberty, Missouri, has been granted a temporary restraining order against the HHS' efforts to terminate its Medicare and Medicaid certification.

After a conference call with both parties, the court sided with the facility, stating that "based on the record before it, the Court has doubts that the Plaintiff's residents are in any immediate jeopardy."

Liberty has been a Special Focus Facility since 2022.

McKnight's, 03/11/2025

M'caid Cuts Fixes Budget on the "backs of seniors"

Minnesota long-term care providers are criticizing a bill they say would balance the state's budget on the "backs of seniors" due to its deep Medicaid cuts.

Governor Tim Walz proposed nearly \$700 million in slashes to Medicaid. Such massive cuts could create care access problems for nursing home-eligible seniors and destroy the state's payment system, said Toby Pearson, CEO of CareProviders of Minnesota.

In addition to a possible decrease in government funding, state's LTC providers are also bracing for economic pressures that could work against their ability to provide quality care or turn a profit.

McKnight's, 03/10/2025

Regardless of Staffing SNFs Have a Culture of Safety

A survey of more than 100 nursing homes revealed that while many are struggling to meet staffing needs, they are excelling in building a culture of safety for residents.

The survey, by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, used 12 patient safety measures to determine whether responding facilities had solid safety workplace cultures.

The top three positive responses, or signs of a safety culture, were feedback and communication about incidents (83%),

overall perceptions of resident safety (82%) and supervisor expectations and actions promoting resident safety (80%).

The investigation featured feedback from 4,411 staff members in 107 nursing homes.

McKnight's, 02/26/2025

Nursing Home Crisis - Not Enough Beds in County

At a time when nursing homes in many areas have census problems, but an Illinois county – has only 60% of the beds it needs.

It's not a rural county, either – Urbana has over 38,000 people in Champaign County with 205,000.

Recently, Advocates for Aging Care presented at the Urbana Committee of the Whole meeting, An Illinois county has outlining what they call a nursing home crisis.

Many spoke about the difficulty of finding care close to home, with some forced to travel as far as Danville and even Chicago to visit loved ones in nursing homes.

WICS-TV, 02/17/2025

Contract Talks Commence For 27 SNFs and 4K Workers

Nearly 4,000 union nursing home workers at 27 long-term care facilities in four Western New York counties began contract talks with their employers late last month.

Contracts covering a majority of the nursing home workers are set to expire April 30, 2025.

Caregivers and management bargain weekly.

Of the 27 nursing homes, located in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Erie, and Niagara Counties, 24 are for-profit and 3 are not-for profit.

SEIU news release, 03/11/2025

**IN THE NEWS will be on vacation the next two weekends. I will be on a cruise with a mission of putting a significant dent in the rum supplies of the Bahamas.
Drew**

Briefly in the News

Purdue Pharma asked a bankruptcy judge late Tuesday to consider the latest version of its plan to settle thousands of lawsuits over the toll of the powerful prescription painkiller OxyContin, a deal that would have members of the Sackler family who own the company pay up to \$7 billion. The filing is a milestone in a tumultuous legal saga that has gone on for more than five years (**AP**).

California Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration is asking for an extra \$2.8 billion immediately for the state's Medicaid program, Medi-Cal, on top of a recently proposed \$3.44 billion loan. New budget figures laid out to state lawmakers on Monday showed the state will need to allocate additional funds from the general fund to fully cover Medi-Cal bills through the end of the year (**Politico**).

A sweeping bill that would expand reporting requirements related to sexual misconduct allegations against health care workers and impose fines for failure to report serious incidents has gained initial approval from an Illinois House committee. The bill follows a newspaper investigation last year that exposed how Illinois health care systems failed to protect patients from sexual abuse and how state government failed to hold them accountable (**Chicago Tribune**).

A team of microbiologists, geneticists and internal medicine skin disease specialists has found that antibiotic-resistant pathogens are carried on the skin of nursing home residents. Over the past several years, medical researchers have become alarmed as many antibiotic agents used to treat infections in people have stopped working as the microbes develop resistance (**Nature**).

Mayo Clinic is investing nearly \$1.9 billion in its Phoenix campus as part of the "Bold. Forward. Unbound." strategy that is being implemented across the system's multistate footprint. The project covers 1.2 million square feet, including a new procedural building, an expanded specialty care building, 11 new operating rooms and two new patient units that port 48 beds, according to a Monday news release. (**Modern Healthcare**).