

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT

"We have facilities with empty wings and it's not for lack of residents — it's just for lack of staff"

Robin Wolzenburg, senior vice president of clinical and regulatory services with LeadingAge Wisconsin.

"A lot of people say foreign-born workers crowd out jobs or lead to worse quality. That's not the case here"

David Grabowski, a professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School on foreign workers

CMS believes that third-cycle standard health inspections may not accurately reflect the current performance of nursing homes, given their age"

CMS statement in announcing 5-Star rating will go to a two-cycle annual survey format

"... not sure if the mandate is officially dead, but it's clearly got one foot in the grave"

ATI Advisory analyst Fred Bentley

They're Less Likely to Go But Need Better Balance

The percentage of long-term care workers planning to leave the industry has fallen by about 25% over the last three years.

In 2022, during the wind down of the pandemic, 57% of all senior care workers surveyed said they planned to leave long-term care.

That figure was just 41% for full-time senior care employees and 46% for independent professionals this year

However, the percentage of senior care workers saying improved work-life balance would help retain them has doubled.

McKnight's, 06/25/2025

Big Beautiful Bill May Spawn Big Ugly Cutbacks

A group of 16 Republicans is urging Senate leaders to walk back aggressive Medicaid cuts proposed by a key committee

The members' letter came on the same day that the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office warned House leaders that states would respond to their cutbacks by "reducing provider payment rates, reducing the scope or amount of optional services, and reducing Medicaid enrollment."

The developments add to the uncertainty around passage of the bill, which in the forms currently being debated, is expected to cut Medicaid by nearly \$800 million over 10 years.

McKnight's, 06/26/2025

Feds: Insurers, MA Plans Will Limit Prior Auths

Dozens of US health insurers, including those with Medicare Advantage plans, pledged on Monday to reduce their use of prior authorizations.

CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz said among the changes are a much smaller list of codes and procedures for which insurers routinely seek prior authorization possibly down from 6,000 to 2,000.

The insurers pledged six key reforms "aimed at cutting red:" Reduce the volume of medical services subject to prior authorization by 01/01/2026; honor existing authorizations; enhance transparency and communication around authorization decisions; expand real-time responses to minimize delays and; ensure medical professionals review all clinical denials.

McKnight's, 06/24/2025

First Of 3 Ark. Schools to Train Med Techs, LPNs

Over the last several years, the number of LPNs produced by traditional programs in Arkansas has declined.

The Arkansas Health Care Association cut the ribbon recently in Little Rock on the first of its three planned nursing schools.

Through the schools, certified nursing assistants within member facilities can take tuition-free courses to advance to a medication assistant-certified (MA-C) role. MA-Cs are eligible for further training to become LPNs if they wish.

Students will work part-time and go to school part-time during the 10-month program which will be paid by the facilities.

Senior Living, 06/25/2025

Texas Illegally Keeping Disabled People in SNFs

Texas has been violating federal law for decades by sequestering individuals with severe disabilities in nursing homes without offering them alternative living options.

A Texas federal judge ruled recently that Texas has caused irreparable injury to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by denying them specialized services, including federally required services within the community.

The decision stems from a class action lawsuit, filed in 2010 by disability rights advocates and six institutionalized plaintiffs, that alleges that state social services officials have violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to provide appropriate treatment to some 4,500 Texans living in nursing homes.

Texas Tribune, 06/20/2025

Buffalo-area Strike Failed Sides Are "Cooling Off"

Following a 7-day strike at two care facilities owned and operated by the McGuire group and Living Legends, union members have voted down their employers latest offer.

The failed vote gives the union bargaining committee authority to issue a 10-day notice to strike 2 McGuire owned facilities.

However, at the suggestion of the Mediator from Public Employee Relations Board (PERB), both sides agreed to take a "cooling" off period until July 21. During this time, the union cannot issue a 10-day notice to strike and the employer cannot implement their last, best, and final offer.

SEIU1199 news Release, 06/13/2025

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

AMERICA: The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 17 more measles cases in its 6/20 weekly update, bringing its total for the year to 1,214 confirmed cases from 36 jurisdictions. Although measles cases have slowed since peaking in late March, the uptick in cases brings the country closer to surpassing the 1,274 cases reported in 2019 – to date is the highest number reported in a single year since the disease was eliminated from the United States in 2020. There were 285 confirmed measles cases in 2024 (*CIDRAP*).

UNITED KINGDOM: While memories of masks and enforced lockdowns may be fading for many, COVID-19 frequently rears its ugly head to make an appearance in world headlines. The percentage of known COVID-19 cases attributed to the new Nimbus strain has increased in the UK over the past month. The symptoms are similar to those of previous strains – cough, congestion, headaches, fatigue, sore throat and gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea and diarrhea fever. This particular strain has also been associated with a symptom that has been dubbed “razor blade throat” – an especially severe version of sore throat (*IFL Science*).

AMERICA: Around 1 in 7 U.S. adults who smoke might have some degree of disability. Researchers used data from the 2019-2023 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) for about 150,000 people. During that period, 14.1% of adults who currently smoked had a disability, and estimates for any kind of disability were significantly higher for current or former adult smokers. (*Tobacco Control Journal*).

AMERICA: Having a history of poor sleep quality prior to COVID-19 infection may increase the likelihood of developing long COVID. The research by CONFIDENCE UK, was based on information from non-hospitalized participants with evidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection. The study authors assessed sleep quality via participant answers to a subset of questions from the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. Long COVID was defined as unresolved symptoms at least

12 weeks after infection. (*BLJ Open Respiratory Research*).

CAPITOL HILL: HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. sparred with Democrats throughout a House budget hearing Thursday, with members accusing Kennedy of lying about changes to vaccine oversight, and Kennedy accusing lawmakers of being influenced by campaign contributions from Big Pharma. Kennedy appeared before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health to discuss the Trump administration’s budget request for fiscal 2026 (*The Hill*).

CAPITOL HILL: Rep. Kim Schrier, MD (D-Wash.), tore into Kennedy, accusing him of lying and arguing that he broke a promise not to change the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). During an HHS budget hearing of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, Schrier, a pediatrician, asked Kennedy if he had ever treated measles, bacterial meningitis, pertussis, or whooping cough – Kennedy said he had not (*The Hill*).

THE WORLD: New findings presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology suggest increased levels of fungal spores in the air are strongly linked to surges in cases of influenza and COVID-19. The researchers found increases in fungal spore counts matched surges in flu and COVID activity. The findings from our study suggest that monitoring airborne fungal spore levels could help predict short-term outbreaks (spikes) of flu and COVID-19 (*CIDRAP*)

ILLINOIS: The first human case of West Nile virus in Illinois has been confirmed in Illinois. A southern Illinois resident tested positive for the virus after being hospitalized. It’s the earliest in the year that a human case of West Nile has been observed in Illinois since 2016 (*Chicago Tribune*).

CAMBODIA: In a health ministry Facebook post, Cambodia has reported another human H5N1 avian flu case, the second in a week. It is the seventh case of the year and is part of an overall rise in H5N1 infections in Cambodia since late

2023. The patient is a 41-year-old woman from a province in the northwestern section of the country. She is listed in critical condition (*Avian Flu Diary*).

AMERICA: Moderna in January was awarded \$590 million by the Biden administration to advance the development of its bird flu vaccine and support the expansion of clinical studies for up to five additional subtypes of pandemic influenza. The Trump administration has now cancelled the contract awarded to Moderna for the late-stage development of its bird flu vaccine for humans, as well as the right to purchase shots (*USA Today*).

THE WORLD: A new variant of COVID-19 is on the rise globally, but the overall risk to the public remains low, according to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO). The symptoms of the NB.1.8.1 variant appear to be similar to prior variants of the virus, with such presenting symptoms as fever, headache, cough, runny nose, fatigue, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (*MedScape*).

VARIOUS STATES: Seventeen people have been sickened in a new *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak tied to FreshRealm chicken fettuccine alfredo heat and serve meals. Of the 17, 16 have required hospitalization and 3 people have died. A pregnant woman who was sickened has also reported fetal loss following her infection. The prepared meals were sold at Kroger and Walmart under the Marketside and Home Chef brand names. Cases have been reported in 13 states, and the deaths were reported from Illinois, Michigan, and Texas (*CDC*).

COVID-19, 06/28/2025

World Total Cases
778,186,599

World Total Deaths
7,097,227

U.S. Total Deaths
1,224,618

World Health Organization

Outside Groups Form Independent Vaccine Panel

After Health Secretary Kennedy's decision to fire the entire federal vaccine advisory committee and replace it with 8 people, many of whom are vaccine skeptics, outside experts were looking for alternate sources of unbiased information.

A leading contender is a new group led by Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease expert and the director of CIDRAP at the University of Minnesota.

Osterholm is launching the Vaccine Integrity Project at CIDRAP as a potential alternative to the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Osterholm noted it's always been taken for granted that vaccines would always be available, but "Now that's in question."

NBC News, 06/22/2025

Mandate May Not Be Dead, But Grim Reaper is Lurking

Last week's ruling from a federal judge that vacated the Biden staffing mandate may not have killed the measure, but it's certainly on life support.

"This ruling is further confirmation that the staffing mandate does not work for America's seniors and that [CMS] is exceeding its authority," said American Health Care Association spokeswoman Rachel Reeves.

Representatives of LeadingAge said the Biden administration strategy and calculus were wrong from the start. The judge's ruling came in a case filed by 18 LeadingAge state affiliates and 20 state attorneys general.

McKnight's, 06/23/2025

STUDY: As Medicaid Use Increases, Staffing Decreases

Facilities with the highest Medicaid payer-mix had average total staffed core nursing positions at 82% of what SNFs with the fewest provided.

Regardless of ownership, results indicate that average nursing staff levels decrease consistently as Medicaid payer-mix increases. Homes with less than 50% Medicaid days averaged 4.08 hours of

total nursing PPD. Those with the most Medicaid, (86% and above) staffed at an average of 3.40 nursing hours.

The researchers from Miami (Ohio) and Georgia Southern Universities said their findings indicate states and the federal government need to better fund nursing homes to drive staffing and quality improvements.

Journal of the American Medical Directors Association.,
06/16/2025

Rhode Island Retreats On Staffing Minimum

Rhode Island has become the latest state to reconsider its nursing home staffing minimum, lowering its hourly standards and waving what providers say could have been more than \$500 million in penalties.

Changes to the mandate, including a reduction in hourly direct patient care from 3.81 hours daily to 3.58 hours daily, were included in the state's 2026 state budget. It passed last week, even without the governor's signature.

But most important might be the forgiveness of previously unassessed penalties. Nursing homes were docked \$63 million over staffing violations.

McKnight's, 06/27/2025

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McKnight's, 06/23/2025

ONE COLUMN

3 NJ SNFs Face

\$2.1 Million Claw Back

New Jersey's Medicaid Fraud Division reviewed copies of professional licenses, timesheets, and payroll records of three nursing homes for July 2023 and found that all three failed to meet minimum staffing requirements every single day of the month.

The office of the State Comptroller is seeking to recover the funds that Medicaid paid to each facility during July 2023.

OCS said because of the pervasiveness and seriousness of the deficiencies, it is imposing penalties proportionate to the severity of understaffing Barneget Rehabilitation and Nursing Center (\$791,380), Belle Care Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (\$647,304), and Barclays Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center (\$735,180).

"The numbers don't lie," said Fraud Division Director Josh Lichtblau. "We looked at 31 days, and they failed to meet the legal requirements every day."

OSC reviewed data for all 93 shifts (day, evening, and night shifts) for the 31 days of July 2023 and found the three facilities failed to meet required staffing levels every single day of the month. The Cherry Hill-based Barclays Rehabilitation and Healthcare did not adequately staff 85 of the 93 shifts, and OSC found that one aide continued to work for seven days after their certification had expired. Barneget Nursing and Rehabilitation Center did not adequately staff 86 of the 93 shifts. The Belle Care facility did not adequately staff 83 of the 93 shifts. Most alarming, for 3 of the 93 shifts, Belle Care did not have any direct care staff members present to care for 82 residents.

In their responses, the facilities did not refute OSC's findings and failed to submit corrective action plans, but instead said the staffing mandates are too onerous and therefore unconstitutional. The Health Care Association of New Jersey, which represents the long-term care industry, has sued to overturn the staffing mandates.

NJ State Comptroller news release, 06/19/2025

MA Plans Extend Hospital Stays, Reduce SNF Services

Patients in Medicare Advantage plans are staying longer in the hospital but receiving considerably less post-acute care than their peers in traditional Medicare, according to a new study.

Skilled nursing facilities are often traditionally overlooked entirely by MA plans, which by 2022 were discharging directly to home health agencies 12.4% more often.

Even though MA hospital discharges to post-acute settings increased by 5.6%, from 338 to 357 beneficiaries per 1,000 discharges, the analysis still showed traditional Medicare was more likely to discharge to higher acuity PAC settings, including skilled nursing facilities, inpatient rehabilitation facilities and long-term acute care hospitals.

McKnight's, 06/17/2025

Staff Shortages Disrupt Infusion Clinic at Walter Reed

Staffing shortages continue to plague the U.S. military's flagship hospital in Bethesda, Maryland.

The shortages caused the disruption of services this month in the nephrology infusion clinic at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

A Walter Reed spokeswoman said two nurses at the clinic, which provides infusion services for kidney, some gastroenterology and other department patients, went on emergency leave, forcing hospital leaders to shift staff from other areas of the hospital to support clinic operations.

An April 2024 Defense Department report to Congress said the facility's nursing staff was the lowest in the hospital at just 68% of budget.

Military.com, 06/13/2025

CDC Workers Fired From Prominent Labs Are Rehired

The staff of two world-class laboratories at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that were slated to be closed in a round of cuts announced in April have been informed that their terminations have been canceled.

The CDC's sexually transmitted disease laboratory and its viral hepatitis laboratory were targets of layoffs initiated by the U.S. DoD Service that was led by Elon Musk.

But last week the 55 full-time employees of the two laboratories were notified by email that their terminations had been rescinded.

Stat, 06/16/2025

Illinois Providers Split On Fighting New Bed Tax

Some Illinois LTC providers are calling a proposal to introduce a nursing home bed tax "misguided," and the possible future cause of greater financial burden.

Earnings from the bed tax would be used to increase the Medicaid support rate and would not go toward direct care.

Supporters say the bed tax is necessary to support unchanged Medicaid rates, which has resulted in closed facilities, layoffs and displaced seniors.

Other operators worry that the "uncountable funding" would not just penalize high-performing nursing homes but would also offer no return on the investments they've already made to staffing and upholding quality care.

McKnight's, 05/23/2025

SNF Facing Whistleblower Retaliation Claims

An Oregon nursing home must face a whistleblower retaliation lawsuit involving an admissions director who told a new administrator that her decision to deny admission to a behavioral health patient was disability discrimination.

Hunt asked the administrator to reconsider, arguing that declining an admission based on a "non-presenting mental health diagnosis violated the Fair Housing Act and constituted disability discrimination."

She was accusing her of "overstepping," undermining management and "causing a hostile work environment" and ultimately fired.

A federal judge ruled the 2024 lawsuit brought by Hunt could proceed, based on Oregon's whistleblower protection statute.

McKnight's, 06/11/2025

Briefly in the News

CMS has identified a fraud scheme targeting Medicare providers and suppliers. Scammers are impersonating CMS and sending phishing fax requests for medical records and documentation, falsely claiming to be part of a Medicare audit. **Important to Know:** CMS doesn't initiate audits by requesting medical records via fax. If you receive a suspicious request, don't respond. If you think you got a fraudulent or questionable request, work with your Medical Review Contractor to confirm if it's real (**CMS news release**).

The FDA announced a new national priority voucher plan that aims to cut drug review times to one to two months for companies it says are backing national interests. The Commissioner's National Priority Voucher program is intended to slash review times from the current average of 10 to 12 months. In the first year of the program, the FDA plans to give a limited number of vouchers to companies "aligned with U.S. national priorities" (**Bloomberg**).

In a Canadian study, older diabetic patients on GLP-1 drugs primarily semaglutide (Rybelsus, Ozempic, Wegovy), showed an increased risk of neovascular age-related macular degeneration. The absolute risk was small, however, reaching 0.2% at 3 years among GLP-1 medication users and 0.1% among non-users (**JAMA Ophthalmology**).

Losing weight in middle age could set you up for a longer, healthier life later, according to a new study at the University of Helsinki in Finland (CNN). weight loss of about 6.5% of body weight without medications or surgery in middle-aged people is linked to substantial long-term health benefits (**CNN**).

In a major national study led by UCSF researchers, dementia rates among older Americans were found to vary sharply by region, with the Southeast facing the greatest burden and the San Francisco Bay Area's broader region faring somewhat better. The study drew on health records from more than 1.2 million veterans age 65 and older, served by the VA, the largest integrated health system in the U.S. (**JAMA Neurology**).

