

# IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals  
in 100 Words-or-Less

Edited by Drew Vogel

[drewvogel5255@msn.com](mailto:drewvogel5255@msn.com)

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## THEY SAID IT

*"These findings indicate that after completing the childhood vaccination series, decennial booster vaccinations may no longer be needed to maintain protective immunity in the general population" from a study by Oregon Health & Science University, researchers who suggested tetanus and diphtheria booster vaccinations are no longer necessary*

*"If his unstated goal is to basically destroy the vaccine industry, that could do it" Eddy Bresnitz, MD, former New Jersey's state epidemiologist and former vaccine executive at Merck on RFK, Jr.'s formally rescinding federal recommendations for all flu vaccines containing thimerosal.*

*"No amnesty. No handouts. No citizenship. Just accountability and a path to stability for our economy and our future." U.S. Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL) on the Dignity Act of 2025 that revises immigration policy*

## No Jail Time for Nurse Who Cut Off Resident's Foot

A former nurse at a western Wisconsin nursing home who amputated a hospice patient's foot without consulting a doctor or asking for the patient's consent will avoid jail time as part of a plea agreement.

Mary K. Brown was originally charged in 2022 with two felonies in connection to her treatment of the 62-year-old patient and nursing home resident, who suffered from severely frostbitten feet. His foot was hanging by only a tendon when Brown cut it off.

A final judgment related to her suspended license and any discipline against her is pending before the Wisconsin Board of Nursing.

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 07/24/2025*

## Nation's Largest MA Insurer Acknowledges Federal Probe

UnitedHealth Group, parent company of the nation's largest Medicare Advantage insurer, confirmed Thursday that it is the subject of criminal and civil investigations over its Medicare billing practices.

The healthcare giant said in a filing with the SEC that it had reached out to the DOJ to cooperate with the investigations after learning about them through media coverage.

The investigations reportedly center on upcoding and over-diagnosing by UnitedHealth-affiliated clinicians that could have boosted the company's bottom line, without necessarily delivering Medicare Advantage patients additional care.

*McKnight's, 07/24/2025*

## Bipartisan Immigration Bill, Opportunity to Stay and Work

A bipartisan immigration – the Dignity Act of 2025, a revised version of the the Dignity Act of 2023 – was reintroduced in the U.S. House last week.

It aims to provide a pathway to legal status for certain undocumented immigrants while beefing up border security and reforming the asylum system.

The bill also addresses the need for workforce development.

Long-term care providers have blasted the administration's removal of previously legal work programs and protections, with many LTC campuses reporting the loss of workers this summer. They have clamored for reasonable reform, including reassigning some unused visas to skilled workers.

*Senior Living, 07/24/2025*

## CMS Testing Prior Auths For Traditional Medicare

For both patients and clinicians, one of the advantages of traditional Medicare is that it almost entirely lacks the onerous preauthorization reviews that plague the program's privately administered Medicare Advantage option.

But under a new demonstration program recently announced by the Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid Services, that's about to change.

Preauthorization is about to enter the lives of seniors who have chosen traditional Medicare over Medicare Advantage.

CMS is calling this new model "WiSeR": Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction.

*Stat, 07/25/2025*

## Cuts Looming – Rural Nursing Homes Need Extra Funds

Rural facilities are closing faster than their urban counterparts. Between 2008 and 2019, 472 nursing homes in 400 rural counties closed.

The AHCA reported that rural facilities made up nearly one-third of some 774 closures since the pandemic's 2020 start.

Their loss can be especially problematic for patients when they create skilled nursing deserts that force patients to travel miles from home and often across state borders for extended care.

Researchers are calling for federal support for rural facilities. Environmental factors such as population size and local income, which providers have no control over, are suppressing rural nursing home profits.

*McKnight's, 07/23/2025*

## Fringe Bennies Better Than Cash for CNA Retention

Increasing spending on key fringe benefits is a more cost-effective retention strategy than pushing up wages for CNAs.

Researchers at Georgia Southern University and Scripps Gerontology Center found that while raising pay 10% reduced nurse aide turnover in for-profit nursing homes it didn't show a significant effect in nonprofit or government-run facilities.

Instead, spending more on fringe benefits such as insurance, retirement and support services netted an average 0.20 percentage point decline in nurse aide turnover across for-profit and nonprofit settings. That finding was based on a review of cost reports, Payroll Based Journal data and other federal information.

*McKnight's, 07/24/2025*

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

**AMERICA:** With outbreaks of previously eradicated measles leading the news for months, more epidemics may be in store for the U.S. As vaccination rates among children continue to plummet, concerns are rising over the potential for infectious diseases to spread rampantly in the coming years and decades. Research published in the medical journal JAMA suggests a continued decline could lead to millions of infections from diseases currently considered under control or eradicated (*The Hill*).

**THE WORLD:** More than 14 million children did not receive a single vaccine last year — about the same number as the year before — according to U.N. health officials. Nine countries accounted for more than half of those unprotected children. In their annual estimate of global vaccine coverage, the World Health Organization and UNICEF said about 89% of children under 1 year old got a first dose of the diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough vaccine in 2024, the same as in 2023. About 85% completed the three-dose series, up from 84% in 2023 (*AP*).

**NORTH AMERICA:** Warming trends across North America have helped establish West Nile virus (WNV) as an endemic disease in New York state, and in the future continued climate change will help increase transmissibility of the virus, according to new research published late last week (*Scientific Reports*).

**THE WORLD:** Cumulative aluminum exposure from vaccination during the first 2 years of life did not raise the risk of autism, asthma, or other chronic disorders, a 24-year study of over 1.2 million children in Denmark showed. The findings come as conversations about aluminum in vaccines rise to the forefront in the U.S. (*MedPage Today*).

**ARIZONA:** A resident of Coconino County, Ariz., died from pneumonic plague, the first such death in the county in almost two decades. The resident went to Flagstaff Medical Center recently and died the same day despite attempts to provide “lifesaving resuscitation,” according to a statement on Friday from

Northern Arizona Healthcare, which runs the hospital (*The New York Times*).

**CAPITOL HILL:** Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (N.Y.) called on HHS Sec. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to immediately declare a public health emergency for measles, blaming the senior Trump administration official for failing to respond to the rapid resurgence of the disease. Schumer accused Kennedy in a bluntly worded letter of walking “our country into the nation’s largest measles outbreak in 33 years, leading cases to hit a record high a full 25 years after this country eliminated the disease” (*The Hill*).

**AMERICA:** The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service confirmed 10 more H5N1 avian flu detections in wild and captive mammals, including two with recent sample collection dates—from a harbor seal in Lincoln County, Maine, and a domestic cat in Multnomah County, Oregon. The others were seven skunks from four Texas counties that have sample collection dates in February and March and a harbor seal from Suffolk County, Massachusetts, that was sampled in February (*CIDRAP*).

**THE WORLD:** In just 3 years, the Influenza Vaccines Research and Development (R&D) Roadmap Initiative has demonstrated important advancements in vaccine R&D, accomplishing 14% of its high-priority research goals and making progress on another 83%. While noting barriers in areas such as immunology and vaccinology, the project team outlined achievements in the pursuit of better vaccines against both seasonal flu and strains with pandemic potential (*Vaccine*).

**DENMARK:** A large study in Denmark found, spanning 24 years and 1.2 million children, found no link between aluminum in childhood vaccines and autism, asthma, or chronic disorders. The findings come as conversations about aluminum in vaccines rise to the forefront in the U.S. The authors wrote “Aluminum salts in the extremely small amounts present in some childhood vaccines are not associated with increased risk of 50 health conditions in early childhood” (*MedPage Today*).

**CAPITOL HILL:** The *Rescissions Act of 2025* rescinds funding for global health programs run by the State Department including GAVI, the vaccine alliance program that supports immunizations in low-income countries; U.S.-funded lab training and disease surveillance in West Africa; and maternal health efforts in Nepal (*MedPage Today*).

**AMERICA:** Though COVID-19 activity in the United States is still low, infections are on the rise in some parts of the country, including states in the Southeast, South, and West. The upward trend is reflected mainly in early indicators, including emergency department visits for COVID, which are still very low nationally, at 0.5%. Visits were up 10.9% from the week before, with greater increases in children ages 4 years old and younger. Test positivity is also increasing slightly at the national level, now at 4.8%, up 1.1 percentage points from the previous week (*CIDRAP*).

**EUROPE:** France and Italy have reported their first local dengue cases of the year, France’s from the Loire Valley and Italy’s in Bologna province. Both involved single cases. Portugal had reported two dengue cases in Madeira in January, which the ECDC said likely involved transmission in 2024 (*CIDRAP*).

**WASHINGTON, D.C.:** The USDA announced new measures to reduce foodborne illnesses. Some of the steps include quicker and broader *Listeria* testing, updating training and tools for Food Safety Inspection Service inspectors, reopening stakeholder discussion on strategies to reduce *Salmonella* illnesses, strengthening state partnerships, and empowering the FSIS inspectors to take compliance actions (*CIDRAP News*).

### **COVID-19, 07/24/2025**

**World Total Cases**  
778,407,760

**World Total Deaths**  
7,098,440

**U.S. Total Deaths**  
1,225,368

World Health Organization

## **SNF QRP Non-Compliance Letters May Be in Your Mail**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is providing notifications to facilities that were determined to be out of compliance with the Skilled Nursing Facility Quality Reporting Program (SNF QRP) requirements for CY 2024, which will affect their FY 2026 Annual Payment Update.

Non-compliance notifications are being distributed by the Medicare Administrative Contractors and were placed into facilities' My Reports folders in the Internet Quality Improvement and Evaluation System (iQIES) on July 21, 2025.

Facilities that receive a letter of non-compliance may submit a request for reconsideration to CMS via email no later than 11:59 pm, August 26, 2025.

*AHCA/NCAL, 07/22/2025*

## **Providers Should Audit Psych Diagnoses, Prescriptions**

Do yourself a favor, audit documentation for all residents with mental health disorders to ensure their diagnoses are compliant with new federal guidance.

The guidance puts new emphasis on the use of professional standards in regard to administering antipsychotic medications, diagnosing patients with disorders that require them, or identifying and responding to any other patient needs.

Be sure they are diagnosed according to professional standards of practices ... by a practitioner using evidence-based criteria and professional standards.

Pay attention to residents with schizophrenia diagnoses in particular – CMS has focused on those residents.

*McKnight's, 07/22/2025*

## **Louisiana NP Convicted in \$12M Medicare Fraud Scheme**

A federal jury convicted a Louisiana nurse practitioner for her role in a \$12.1 million health care fraud scheme ordering medically unnecessary cancer genetic tests for hundreds of patients she never met or examined.

Scharmaine Lawson Baker served as a nurse practitioner and was an enrolled Medicare provider.

The Department of Justice said, "She held herself out as an expert in Medicare regulations – authoring publications on medical necessity and patient-provider relationships – while actively violating those very standards.

She preyed on vulnerable patients, siphoned taxpayer dollars, and turned health care into a tool for fraud."

*HHS OIG, 07/24/2025*

## **New Pilot Could Lead to Better Tech Funding for SNFs**

CMS quietly announced its Quality Improvement Network will be collecting new data on nursing homes' "readiness" to access, share and use electronic data.

The agency said the results would be used to "to determine which providers/practices may benefit from participation in a technical assistance pilot" related to quality improvement and reporting.

But which providers will be targeted by the pilot is yet to be determined, and will be heavily colored by the data collected through the new assessment — and possibly by advocacy.

*McKnight's, 06/09/2025*

## **They Pledged LTC Insurance Reform – But Will It Happen?**

In Connecticut at the beginning of the legislative session there were 17 bills that cover a wide range of proposals to reform long-term care insurance.

The proposals ranged from placing caps on annual rate hikes to providing tax credits for consumers and requiring the state to hold public hearings when insurers seek price increases.

Some policy-holders have seen increases as high as 174% and one insurance company is requesting an increase of 560%. Yet with three weeks left, it is questionable the Legislature will pass any reforms for LTC insurance.

*CT Mirror, 05/22/2025*

## **ONE COLUMN**

### **In the Eye of the Beholder 1/3 Misspent – 2/3 Did Not**

A new audit of nursing homes that received emergency federal funding to stay in business during the pandemic found that one-third misspent a small share of their Provider Relief allotments or failed to properly account for spending.

The Department of Health and Human Services analyzed the required spending reports of 30 US skilled nursing facilities that cumulatively received more than \$370 million in Provider Relief Funding.

The payments ranged from less than \$1 million to more than \$132 million per facility.

The audit found that 20 of those nursing homes spent appropriately and accounted for their spending correctly.

The other 10 facilities may have misspent as much as \$2.6 million combined on unallowable expenditures or lost revenues. That equates to less than one percent of misspending, if all of the money in question was indeed spent on unallowable expenses.

An Office of Inspector General report on the audit issued Thursday acknowledged that at least \$330,000 in provider relief may have been spent properly but simply not accurately documented or accounted for according to Health Resource Services Administration requirements.

The nursing homes audited received either general distributions or targeted funds for skilled nursing facilities and infection prevention efforts through the PRF program, which started in 2020. In all, the government rushed some \$145.9 billion in aid to healthcare providers, with about \$9.4 billion specifically earmarked for nursing homes.

Providers were required to report on their use of PRF payments in broad categories, including lost revenues, healthcare-related expenses or general and administrative expenses.

The OIG examination of the 30 facilities called out \$849,443 in unallowed payments and urged HRSA to collect repayment.

*McKnight's, 06/12/2025*

## **Ensign Expects to Hit \$5B In Revenue for First Time**

The Ensign Group is on the cusp of securing an additional large skilled nursing portfolio and remains open to other multi-site purchases.

Marking another record quarter for growth and the acquisition of 52 new assets since the start of 2024 — eight of them since April 1 of 2025 — Ensign executives told investors they are poised to do more of all kinds of deals in the near future.

Already, the 348-facility Ensign is growing and recouping revenue faster than expected for 2025. On Thursday night, the company announced it now expects it could earn more than \$5 billion this year.

*McKnight's, 07/25/2025*

## **LTC Insurance Workplace Benefit Remains Rare**

Approximately 24% of respondents to a recent survey who are eligible for benefits where they work said they had access to long-term care insurance there, but 9% of those employees said they had enrolled in that insurance.

For the Employee Long-Term Care Survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute, which questioned 2,445 workers aged 20 to 74 regarding their awareness of, access to and perspectives on long-term care financing.

About 40% of respondents said they expect to need some form of long-term care in the future themselves, yet only 23% said they know how to access such care.

*Senior Living, 07/23/2025*

## **POA Charged with Exploiting Elderly Pensacola Man**

In Florida Akimmia Lewis has been arrested for financially exploiting a senior Escambia County man.

Lewis allegedly abused her role as the victim's power of attorney by systematically withdrawing funds directly from the victim's bank account.

In 2022 and 2023 Lewis transferred approximately \$46,788.60 to her accounts and made cash withdrawals. Lewis did not

use the money to benefit the victim, who was residing in a nursing facility at the time.

Lewis is charged with one count of Exploitation of an Elderly Person or Disabled Adult (under \$50,000), a second-degree felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

*Florida AG news release, 07/18/2025*

## **South Carolina Man Charged With Abuse of a SNF Resident**

Robin C. Hatley, 61, has been charged with Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult and booked into the Greenville County Detention Center.

Authorities allege that on June 14, 2025, Hatley, a caregiver at Pearl at Five Forks Memory Care Center in Simpsonville, S.C., struck a resident of the facility multiple times on the head, face, and nose.

Pearl at Five Forks Memory Care Center reported this incident to law enforcement and cooperated fully with investigators.

Hatley could get up to five years in prison, a fine of up to \$5,000, or both.

*SC AG news release, 07/18/2025*

## **Former Prisoners Can Now Receive Medicare**

Medicare generally doesn't pay for services to people who are in jail or prison.

The rule is based on a presumption that healthcare services are covered by another entity, like a corrections facility.

That rule didn't change this year. What did change is its definition of "custody."

People who are released to the community pending trial, living in a halfway house, or on parole, probation, or home confinement are now eligible for Medicare services.

Medicare will still generally not pay for services for Medicare enrollees who are incarcerated in a jail, prison, penitentiary, or similar institution.

*Justice in Aging, 07/21/2025*

## **Briefly in the News**

One sector in healthcare is embracing the sweeping policy changes from President Trump's signature tax law. The legislation delivers a series of potential wins for digital health companies. Telehealth companies are quietly celebrating its wins under the law. Plans and employers can offer patients with health savings accounts tied to high-deductible health plans discounted telehealth services *(Modern Healthcare)*.

Two early studies suggested that sebum may help identify Parkinson's disease. In the first paper, two dogs trained to distinguish sebum swabs from people with and without Parkinson's disease demonstrated sensitivity of up to 80% and specificity of up to 98% *(Journal of Parkinson's Disease)*.

Popular weight loss medications like *Ozempic* can help reverse low testosterone levels in men with obesity or Type 2 diabetes. Building on previous studies that show weight loss surgery or lifestyle changes can increase testosterone levels in the body, researchers at SSM Health St. Louis University Hospital analyzed the electronic health records of 110 men with obesity or Type 2 diabetes to monitor changes in the hormone while taking GLP-1 receptor agonists, such as *semaglutide* and *tirzepatide* *(NBC News)*.

Nearly a fifth of U.S. adults previously deemed "overweight" would be categorized as "obese" under a 2024 obesity classification framework. Using the recent obesity framework, 18.8% of the adults who had previously been categorized as "overweight" now fit under the "obese" category (Annals of Internal Medicine).

Sen. Rand Paul, MD (R-Ky.), took aim at former President Joe Biden's pardon of Anthony Fauci, MD, in a new interview. During his final hours in office, Biden pardoned Fauci, former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), to guard against potential "revenge" by the incoming Trump administration. However, Paul questioned the pardon in an interview with conservative activist Charlie Kirk *(MedPage Today)*.