

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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Vol 9

08/10/2025

THEY SAID IT

"Older Americans deserve to live with dignity, but we continue to see far too many cases of abuse and neglect at nursing homes" U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) after introducing The Strengthening Advocacy for Long-Term Care Residents Act

"Vaccine skepticism in the U.S. kills more children outside the U.S. — because it transfers that skepticism — than it does inside the United States" Bill Gates speaking for the Gates Foundation

"Had they not done a fantastic job, we could have had quite a few patients [suffer] from smoke inhalation or other injuries. So, I do commend the staff" Somerset, MA Fire Chief Jamison Barros after fire broke out in a nursing home

Fire! Staff Commended For Protecting Residents

A Somerset, Massachusetts nursing home avoided a tragedy with the help of fast-acting staff when a fire broke out in the pre-dawn hours Thursday morning.

Somerset firefighters responded to the Somerset Ridge Center Skilled Nursing Facility just before 3:40 a.m. Thursday morning after the fire reportedly broke out in the empty community center room.

Staff had residents shelter in place preventing possible smoke inhalation and other injuries.

Some staff members used fire extinguishers to knock down the fire and the sprinkler system activated.

Boston Herald, 08/07/2025

House Dems Urge CMS to Reject Prior Auths Changes

Forty Democratic members of the U.S. House has sent a letter to CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz and Deputy Administrator Abe Sutton urging them to reject any efforts to expand the pre-treatment approval process, more commonly known as prior authorization, in Traditional Medicare.

Last month, CMS released **plans** to implement the Wasteful and Inappropriate Services Reduction (WiSeR) pilot, which will require Traditional Medicare providers to obtain approval from for-profit companies prior to administering necessary health services.

The administration plans to pay these for-profit companies a portion of the "savings" collected from denied care.

*Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
news release, 07/31/2025*

Investigation Launched Into UnitedHealth's SNF Pay

Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) announced Thursday they've launched an investigation into whether UnitedHealth Group encouraged nursing homes to limit hospitalizations among patients enrolled in some of the company's health plans.

The news follows an article in *The Guardian* in May that reported that UnitedHealth gave nursing homes bonuses to limit hospitalizations among certain patients enrolled in UnitedHealth's Medicare Advantage plans, resulting in delays in medically necessary hospitalizations and emergency room visits.

The media outlet also reported that the company's workers pushed residents to sign do-not-resuscitate orders, which can prohibit hospitalization.

Stat, 08/07/2025

Behavioral Health Program For SNFs Will Fold its Tent

A three-year-old federal behavioral health resource for nursing homes that has seen demand for services double each year will be out of business by late September.

The Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health in Nursing Facilities announced that its grant funding will run out Sept. 29. Live technical consultations and new training will cease, with no clear replacement even as the number of residents with mental health and substance use disorders explodes.

Through June, the center provided 5,000 one-on-one technical consultations, more than 90,000 website visitors, 49,000 resource downloads, and 32,000 training sessions.

McKnight's, 08/04/2025

Medicaid HCBS Up Institutional LTSS Down

New data from the Medicaid and CHIP Payment advisory Commission (MACPAC) shows that the number of people using Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS) has expanded in recent years.

It comes as the newly passed Big Beautiful Bill Act threatens states' HCBS programs.

MACPAC found that in 2019, approximately 2.2 million Medicaid beneficiaries used HCBS. By 2021, that number had risen to more than 2.5 million. Meanwhile, the number of institutional users declined. In 2019, about 1.8 million Medicaid beneficiaries used institutional LTSS. In 2021, the number had shrunk to about 1.5 million people.

McKnight's Home Care, 07/27/2025

LTC Up Slightly, While Country's Hiring Hit the Wall

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that skilled nursing workforce gained just 2,000 jobs last month, and CCRCs and assisted living communities added only 1,100 jobs.

The healthcare sector accounted for the most gains in employment last month, adding 55,000 of the 73,000 jobs added to the economy. Ambulatory care services led the sector, adding 34,000 jobs, followed by hospitals (16,000) and home health services (14,000).

Senior Living, 08/04/2025

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

AMERICA: the latest data from the CDC indicates COVID-19 cases are reported to be rising in 27 states and "likely growing" in 12 states more as well as in Washington D.C., The CDC warned that COVID-19 infections are estimated to be "growing or likely growing in 40 states declining or likely declining in zero states, and not changing in nine states," as of July 29 (*Newsweek*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: The Senate voted along party lines to confirm Susan Monarez as the new director of the CDC. Monarez has been serving as the acting head of the CDC since January. She was viewed as somewhat surprising pick for the CDC role because unlike most recent CDC directors, she holds a Ph.D. but is not a medical doctor (*CBS News*).

AMERICA: All 17 experts who were ousted from a government panel on vaccine recommendations last month are speaking out against what the panel has become under Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s leadership. In a commentary published in the New England Journal of Medicine titled "The Path Forward for Vaccine Policy in the United States," the former members of the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices described a "seismic disruption" to the vaccine recommendation process in the U.S. (*CBS News*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: In his ongoing effort to reshape health policy, Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. reportedly plans to overhaul two more government entities: the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. Ousting the existing members of the task force would give Kennedy a measure of control in determining the kinds of preventive care that are covered at no cost to patients in the United States (*KFF Health News*).

AMERICA: A new COVID variant is climbing the ranks in the U.S., becoming the third-most common strain of the summer. Variant XFG, colloquially known as "Stratus," was first detected in Southeast Asia in January but accounted for less than about 0% of cases in the

United States until May. By late June, it was estimated to account for up to 14%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*USA Today*).

MINNESOTA: The Department of Health (MDH) announced that it is tracking a rise in tularemia cases in humans and in companion animals, especially in Twin Cities residents and in cats. Tularemia is caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*, which can be found in wildlife, particularly rabbits, squirrels, beavers, muskrats and other rodents (*CIDRAP*).

CENTRAL HARLEM: The New York City Department of Health is issuing a warning against a Legionnaires' outbreak in Central Harlem. So far one person has died and 22 cases in five separate zip codes have been reported, and several others have been tested and are awaiting results. Health officials are testing water samples to try and find the source. People only get sick by breathing in water vapor containing *Legionella* bacteria, and the disease is not transmitted from person to person (*WABC-TV*).

AMERICA: Amid ongoing record post-elimination measles activity in the United States, four states have reported more measles cases or exposures, including Colorado, Iowa, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Meanwhile, in its weekly update the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said the measles outbreak has now reached at least 1,319 cases (*CIDRAP*).

ATLANTA: In another change to how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) vaccine advisory group operates, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on July 31 sent a letter to members of about 30 nonvoting liaison groups from medical and public health organizations that bars their participation on work groups (*CNN*).

AMERICA: The H5N1 bird flu virus has historically extracted a heavy toll when it infects humans. over the past three decades nearly half of confirmed cases were fatal. But of the 70 cases reported in the United States over the past 18 months, only a single death occurred,

leaving experts puzzled at how to explain the phenomenon (*Stat*).

KENYA: The antiparasitic drug ivermectin reduced the incidence of malaria by 26% in a cluster randomized study conducted in Kenya, which has a high rate of the disease and of use of bed nets against mosquito bites. "Ivermectin has shown great promise in reducing malaria transmission and could complement existing control measures," first author Carlos Chaccour, MD, PhD, said in a news release (*CIDRAP*).

WISCONSIN: Health officials have confirmed the state's first measles cases this year. Nine people in Oconto County, in the northeastern part of the state, were exposed to a common source of infection during out-of-state travel. No public points of exposure have been identified but investigation continues (*CIDRAP*).

THE WORLD: Vaccination delivered an estimated 14.8 million life-years saved worldwide, with the benefits skewed heavily to older people. Those ages 60 and older accounted for three-for 75.9% of life-years saved. People ages 40 through 59 were responsible for 20.5% of preserved life-years. Only 2% of the saved life-years belonged to long-term care residents (*JAMA Health Forum*).

THE WORLD: Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates expressed concern about growing vaccine skepticism in the United States, suggesting that the exporting of claims by the anti-vaccine movement will likely extract a bigger death toll internationally than domestically and could also put the possibility of ridding the world of measles permanently out of reach (*Stat*).

COVID-19, 08/07/2025

World Total Cases
778,433,861

World Total Deaths
7,099,104

U.S. Total Deaths
1,225,706

World Health Organization

Cop Killed on CDC Campus – Suspected Shooter Dead

The man suspected of gunning down a police officer near CDC headquarters in Atlanta Friday has been named as Patrick Joseph White, 30, of Kennesaw, Georgia. White died a short time later.

The deadly incident unfolded when White opened fire in front of the CDC campus, unleashing a barrage of bullets that pierced multiple windows. And hiyt At least four CDC buildings.

Officers located the shooter in a nearby CVS pharmacy with at least one gunshot wound.

It was not clear if he died from police gunfire or a self-inflicted gunshot.

The motive for the shooting is not known.
WAGA-TV, 08/09/2025

DOL Launches Self-Audits To Help You with Labor Laws

The U.S. Department of Labor has unveiled several programs designed to help employers, unions, and pension plans voluntarily assess and improve their compliance with federal labor laws

The self-audit programs, which include new and updated offerings, aim to enhance worker protection while reducing the likelihood of formal investigation or litigation.

Of interest to long-term care entities: OSHA; the Office of Labor-Management Standards; and the Wage and Hour Division are the agencies providing self-audit programs.

DOL news release, July 2025

Bill in Congress Would Boost Ombudsman Programs

The Strengthening Advocacy for Long-Term Care Residents Act proposes hiring a full-time national director for the first time in six years and setting new state-level ratios for ombudsmen.

The national program was established under the Older Americans Act and allows states to designate staff and trained

volunteers to advocate for residents of nursing homes.

Ombudsmen respond to complaints and patient advocacy requests and can work with a nursing home to find solutions. They also may be required to notify state agencies or law enforcement in the case of certain lapses in care or suspected abuse or neglect.

McKnight's, 07/31/2025

EU Tariff May Cost Drugmakers Billions

The trade deal reached between the U.S. and the European Union on Sunday will impose a 15% tariff on imported medicines from Europe.

Drugmakers manufacture some of their biggest and best-known blockbusters there, including *Botox*, cancer medication *Keytruda* and popular weight-loss drugs like *Ozempic*.

The tariff rate is much lower than the levies of up to 200% that President Trump had threatened. Still, the new import costs stand to add billions of dollars in expenses for the drug industry and could lead to price increases.

That could translate into higher out-of-pocket costs and higher health insurance premiums for Americans.

The New York Times, 07/28/2025

A Boost for Nebraska Assisted Living Communities

The Nebraska Appropriations Committee recently agreed to fund a \$3.2 million increase in provider rates for rural assisted living communities, bringing rural rates in line with those paid to urban providers.

The increase is the result of a 2022 state Department of Health and Human Services study that found that urban communities received a higher rate despite offering similar services.

This year's budget will increase rural assisted living single occupancy daily rates from \$62.73 to match the urban rate of \$73.91 in the next fiscal year.

Senior Living

ONE COLUMN **First Five-Star Since** **Changes Was A 'Yawner'**

Since CMS dropped the third-cycle surveys from the Five-Star ratings calculation (most recent survey counts for 75% of the total score now) providers have been awaiting the results of the July 30 update.

Fortunately, changes in state cut points used to determine how many stars nursing homes receive seem to have mitigated the effect of the worse survey scores.

Formation Healthcare found the average survey score went from 78.3 points in June up to 85.8 in July. But even with those higher numbers, noted Managing Partner Jessica Curtis, about 125 more facilities earned 3-4-or-5-star health inspection ratings in July.

About 14% of nursing homes saw an increase in their health inspection star rating, which raised the national average from 2.79 in June to 2.81 last month.

But that wasn't the only win. Data software firm StarPro said the average quality measure star rating on Care Compare took a slightly bigger jump, moving from 3.39 to 3.45 stars.

Still, the overall effect is modest — and especially so on the consumer-facing end.

We really haven't seen a seismic shift in survey or overall ratings on aggregate," said StarPro's Spencer Blackman.

He noted that 92% of facilities saw an increase in their cycle 1 weight survey score under the new methodology, but that just 11% of all facilities had a reduction in their health inspection stars.

One immediate implication of the higher weight given to cycle 1 surveys: Many more nursing homes — potentially double, as many as 109 — moved onto or off of the Special Focus Facility candidate list month over month than is typical.

The heavier weighting of the cycle 1 surveys could be either a negative or positive for facilities, but when there are deficiencies in a new survey (annual, complaint or infection control) cycle back to a lower weight or fall off, their score could drastically improve more than it could in the past.

McKnight's, 07/31/2025

SPLAT! A Water Balloon Fight Now That's an Activity

The residents and staff of Pinnacle Nursing Home in Price, Utah closed off part of their parking lot on Thursday, for their sixth annual Super Group Battleship.

A barrier was hung between two teams, while residents and staff loaded up on water balloons to throw across the wall.

First the residents got to throw balloons at staff, and then the teams mixed and the event continued. Over 1,500 water balloons were at the fighter's disposal, ready to splat on an opponent.

"This is a celebration of summertime," Activities Director Debbie Pappas amid whooping, screeching and smiles from everyone.

ETV News, 08/08/2025

LTC Key to Reversing Loneliness in Seniors

Researchers recently found that older adults who move into nursing homes and assisted living facilities typically turn around previous declines into loneliness,

A new national study reveals that seniors become more socially active in many ways, suggesting that fears of isolation in long-term care are unfounded for many.

Researchers from the University of Colorado uncovered greater participation in group activities (up 15.6%) and religious services (up 12.6%), for example, after a facility move-in.

That's compared to a steady decline of 2% to 4.7% in all social activities before making the move.

JAMA Internal Medicine, 08/08/2025

7 Arrested – 9 More Linked To Resident Abuse

Italian police in Sicily have executed arrest warrants against seven people – of 16 under investigation – accused, to varying degrees, of mistreatment and violence against disabled and elderly patients admitted to two residential communities in the municipality of Pachino.

The investigation documented the violence and humiliation suffered by 20 residents—mentally disabled and elderly—of two social and healthcare facilities.

The investigation was prompted by reports from several citizens who said that disabled people were forced to live in poor conditions and without adequate assistance.

Undone Sarda, 08/04/2025

JAK Inhibitors Linked To Reduced Mortality

In a study, among adults hospitalized with COVID-19, the use of Janus kinase inhibitors is associated with decreased mortality for all levels of respiratory support and fewer serious and severe adverse events.

By day 28 after infection 755 (11.7%) of 6465 participants in the JAK inhibitor group had died vs 805 (13.2%) of 6108 participants in the no JAK inhibitor group

JAKs are enzymes that play a crucial role in cell signaling pathways, particularly those related to inflammation and immune responses. JAK inhibitors work by blocking the activity of these enzymes.

Vaccine Advisor, 08/04/2025

After Symptoms Arise Dementia Diagnosis Delayed

Once the first signs of dementia become apparent An average of 3.5 years passes before a diagnosis is made.

It's even longer (4.1 years) for people with early-onset dementia or frontotemporal dementia.

The study, which included data from 30,000 participants in US, Europe, Australia and China, is the first systematic review and meta-analysis of time-to-diagnosis in dementia using global data.

The researchers, from the University College London, acknowledge that some diagnostic delay is understandable, but said the evidence showed that it remains unnecessarily long.

McKnight's, Clinical Daily News, 07/28/2025

Briefly in the News

A year ago, Eli Lilly & Co. was poised to become the first pharmaceutical company to register a trillion-dollar market valuation. It still hasn't cracked that ceiling. Instead, a series of weak earnings reports, a setback for its obesity drug and threats of sky-high tariffs have taken Lilly investors on a wild ride only to deposit them almost exactly where they started. Down 21% from an August record, Lilly trades at \$762 a share and is worth \$722 billion — not bad, but not the lofty figures investors were expecting

A new provision related to direct primary care (DPC) in the recently enacted reconciliation bill will create more opportunities for physicians in small towns to open independent practices, Jeff Davenport, MD, of Edmonton, Oklahoma, said Tuesday. "What an opportunity for small-town America to have a doctor be able to practice in a model like this and have more expanded opportunities," Davenport said at an event sponsored by the American Academy of Family Physicians (**MedPage Today**).

The newborn savings accounts created as part of President Donald Trump's massive new tax and immigration law are a "back door for privatizing Social Security," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Wednesday. The "Trump accounts" enacted as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill give newborns a \$1,000 savings account that can be invested with tax-deferred treatment. Families or their employers can make \$5,000 contributions to the accounts each year until the beneficiary turns 18 (**The Washington Post**).

Despite similarities in education and income levels, surgeons had a higher mortality rate than non-surgeon physicians. The age- and sex-adjusted mortality rate per 100,000 population was 355.3 for surgeons versus 228.4 for non-surgeon physicians. The demands of surgical practice, including long work hours, high-pressure environments, workplace violence, and occupational exposures (e.g., radiation) may make surgeons vulnerable to health risks (**JAMA Surgery**).