

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

Edited by Drew Vogel

drewvogel5255@msn.com

Vol 9

08/17/2025

THEY SAID IT

"Virginia's seniors and families deserve peace of mind knowing their loved ones are receiving the highest quality care" Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin after signing Executive to strengthen oversight of Nursing Homes

"RN supervisors should not bear the burden of liability for the actions of unlicensed personnel" Massachusetts Nurses Association Director of Nursing Betty Sanisidro in opposition to the Massachusetts certified medication aide program

"People are looking for growth opportunities when they look for careers, not just jobs" Kristen Knapp, senior director of strategy and communications of the Florida Health Care Association on the organization's improved scholarship program

Get Ready, You're About to Be Survey-Slammed

Surveys are going to get tougher.

Surveyors are now intensifying efforts to keep operators in check. What's not as clear yet is how intent officials will be on levying penalties.

After a pause because of the pandemic, there's more pressure and scrutiny. They're catching up with what was already in place. They're really scrutinizing coding on the MDS and PBJ.

They're going to be auditing procedures for the QRP and value-based purchasing, which comes back to, is your assessment accurate?

The current climate was shaped by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which came just five months after the start of the Patient Driven Payment Model.

McKnight's, 08/13/2025

Solution To Staffing Crisis? Throw Money at It!

When Monarch Health Management first announced it was offering a \$100,000 job retention bonus, it sounded like an outlandish recruitment scheme.

In reality, it was a way to keep employees in the trenches, especially those who didn't get COVID-era sign-on incentives.

Frontline staff who stay part of Monarch's growing team can net \$2,500 a quarter through 2031. That translates to a \$10,000 annual bonus, or \$100,000 over the program's lifetime.

"That's how you battle the staffing crisis," Marc Halpert said. "Thinking outside the box, doing things that no one else is thinking of."

McKnight's, 08/12/2025

State Ass'n Responds To LTC Staffing Needs

Citing the costs and complications of turnover in long-term care, the Florida Health Care Association has tripled its annual scholarship giving as a way of contributing to retention efforts and lifting up caregiving and leadership careers.

A combo of long-term planning and generous donors allowed the Florida Health Care Association to increase the number and amount of scholarships it awarded.

The association's Long Term Career Advancement scholarship program awarded a total of \$328,500 to 93 caregivers in July — a significant increase over last year's total awards of \$69,500 to 29 recipients.

McKnight's, 08/12/2025

Group Says CDC Shooting Incident Was Not Random

A union representing workers at the CDC said the [shooting] incident was not random and "compounds months of mistreatment, neglect, and vilification that CDC staff have endured."

It demanded federal officials condemn vaccine misinformation, saying it was putting scientists at risk.

Fired But Fighting, a group of laid-off CDC employees, has said HHS Sec. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is directly responsible for the villainization of CDC's workforce through "his continuous lies about science and vaccine safety, which have fueled a climate of hostility and mistrust."

Associated Press, 08/11/2025

CDC Shooter Blamed Covid-19 Vaccine for Mental Issues

The man suspected of opening fire on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's sprawling campus had blamed the COVID-19 vaccine for making him sick and depressed, according to information gathered by law enforcement and sources close to the suspect.

The investigation remains ongoing. The information is preliminary at this time.

Patrick White is believed to have struggled with his mental health, according to that information. As he grappled with those issues, sources said, White had become increasingly fixated on the COVID-19 vaccine as a source of his grievances.

White was killed by police or by self-inflicted gunshot.

ABC News, 08/11/2025

Same Vaccine - a "Medical Miracle" Then, Defunded Now

Top public health officials during President Donald Trump's first term praised mRNA vaccines. In the second term, officials seem to be retreating from them.

When the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine was authorized for emergency use by the FDA in December 2020, President Donald Trump termed it a "medical miracle."

However, last week, current Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced that the government was canceling at least \$500 million of federally funded mRNA vaccine development, potentially affecting U.S. preparedness for future pandemics and squashing enthusiasm for technology that has been hailed as a potential promise for cancer and HIV vaccines.

ABC News, 08/12/2025

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

AMERICA: The number of people with COVID-19 in the U.S. is low but increasing, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data released Friday. COVID-19 is trending up in many mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Southern, and West Coast states. The CDC said infections are “growing or likely growing” in 40 states, based on emergency department visit data as of July 29. Infections were unchanged in nine states. The weekly percentage of emergency department visits among people diagnosed with COVID-19 is low, but growing (*The Hill*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: The FDA has signaled that it might not renew the emergency use authorization (EUA) for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 6 months to 4 years old for the upcoming respiratory virus season. Pulling the Pfizer EUA would remove the only COVID-19 vaccine approved for all children from the US market. The Moderna vaccine is approved only for children with one or more health conditions, and the Novavax vaccine is cleared only for use in children ages 12 years and older (*The Guardian*).

THE WORLD: Researchers at Stanford University School of Medicine in California report COVID vaccination prevented an estimated 2.5 million deaths globally from December 2020 to October 2024, with lives saved among people ages 60 and older accounting for nearly 90% of the saved lives. Children ages 19 and younger made up only 0.01% of the estimated total lives saved by vaccination, with young adults ages 20 to 29 accounting for another 0.07% (*JAMA Health Forum*).

CHINA: U.S. health officials have issued a travel advisory for parts of China following a surge in chikungunya infections, a mosquito-borne viral disease that has sickened more than 7,000 people in Guangdong province since mid-June. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is urging travelers to exercise “increased caution,” particularly in the city of Foshan, the epicenter of the outbreak (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

AMERICA: For two decades, Washington, D.C., pediatrician Lanre Falusi has counseled parents about vaccine safety, side effects, and timing. But this year, she said, the conversations have changed. ... Throughout the country, pediatricians say anxious parents are concerned about access to routine childhood immunizations, especially those with children on Medicaid, the government insurance program for low-income families and people with disabilities. Medicaid covers 4 in 10 children in the U.S. (*KFF Health News*).

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*).

AMERICA: The bird flu virus that has beset dairy farms since early last year may be spreading through the air in so-called milking parlors and through contaminated wastewater and milking equipment. The Department of Agriculture has said that the virus spreads primarily from milking equipment or is carried by dairy workers and vehicles traveling between farms. But in the new study, scientists found live virus in the air of milking facilities, suggesting that cows and farmworkers might have become infected by inhaling the pathogen (*The New York Times*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is launching an integrated care model to tackle hepatitis C. Through the Hepatitis C Elimination Initiative Pilot, the model will address “critical risk factors like substance use, mental health challenges and homelessness head-on” About \$100 million in funding is available for the program (*Fierce Healthcare*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said he is working to overhaul the Vaccine Injury Compensation

Program (VICP), which is aimed at compensating people who have been injured by vaccines. Kennedy wrote in a lengthy post on social platform X “The VICP is broken, and I intend to fix it. I will not allow the VICP to continue to ignore its mandate and fail its mission of quickly and fairly compensating vaccine-injured individuals,” Kennedy has long targeted the VICP, and his X post echoed many of his previous arguments (*The Hill*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: The nominee to lead the Veterans Health Administration hopes to streamline Veterans Affairs medical care so patients face fewer obstacles when they seek treatment, whether at a VA facility or with a community provider. During his confirmation hearing for VA under secretary for health, Air Force Reserve Maj. Gen. John Bartrum addressed the ongoing debate over the future of VA health care (*Military.com*).

THE WORLD: Respiratory infections like COVID-19 and the flu may increase the risk of dormant breast cancer cells reactivating and spreading in those with a history of the disease. This is the conclusion of a study based on experiments with mice and observational human health data by researchers at the University of Colorado, the Montefiore Einstein Comprehensive Cancer Center (MECCC) in New York and Utrecht University (*Newsweek*).

AFRICA: Officials from the Africa CDC said Guinea's Mpox outbreak is escalating exponentially, showing similar signs to a recent surge in Sierra Leone. Countries in West Africa were affected later than hot spots in central Africa such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Burundi. (*CIDRAP*).

COVID-19, 08/15/2025

World Total Cases
778,457,848

World Total Deaths
7,099,375

U.S. Total Deaths
1,225,927

World Health Organization

Kennedy: Flu Vaccine is OK for Everyone – Almost

HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. last month quietly endorsed recommendations from his handpicked vaccine advisors that everyone in the U.S. ages 6 months and older receive a flu shot for the upcoming season.

The backdated notice appeared on the ACIP recommendations page without fanfare.

Kennedy's false claims have extended to flu vaccines including saying there is "zero evidence that the flu shot prevents any hospitalizations or any deaths" and that people who get the flu shot are "six times more likely to give the flu to somebody else."

Skilled Nursing News, 08/08/2025

More Oversight of Nursing Homes in Virginia

Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin has signed an executive order that seeks to heighten the oversight at nursing homes. Youngkin highlighted this initiative through four main priorities: increase workforce capacity, strengthen nursing home oversight, modernize operations and increase transparency.

the order will create a "robust" recruitment campaign for long-term medical facility inspectors. It will also create a second facility for the Office of Licensure and Certification in Northern Virginia.

There will also be a new advisory board on nursing home oversight and accountability, which will propose recommendations on policies and practices to improve resident well-being and quality of care.

WAVY-TV, 08/12/2025

WVA Selling Four State Nursing Homes

West Virginia Gov. Patrick Morrisey announced that the Marx Development Group (MDG) will purchase four state-owned facilities for \$60 million.

Operating in Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Kentucky, MDG currently owns and operates 55 facilities with over 5,000 licensed beds.

The Governor said MDG plans to invest in building between three and five new health care facilities in the state to replace the aging facilities.

Morrisey said the four long-term care facilities — which have 511 licensed beds — operate at a combined \$6 million annual loss, with long-term projected costs expected to rise to nearly \$40 million per year.

Parkersburg News & Sentinel, 08/13/2025

Deadly Fire Exposes Gaps in Subsidized Assisted Living

On July 13 10 people died in a fire at Gabriel House, a Medicare subsidized AL in Massachusetts.

The subsidized affordable care model Gabriel House operated under has drawn scrutiny from senior care advocates and state lawmakers since the deadly blaze.

Many contend it isn't sustainable for facility upkeep and resident care, even though the model provides a place to go for many people who couldn't otherwise afford assisted living.

A new spotlight has emerged on the affordable facilities, as lawmakers and state officials seek potential solutions to remedy inequities and ensure safety.

MassLive, 08/12/2025

A Quarter of Families of Older Adults Provide Care

In a University of Michigan study about 26% of both households and immediate families of older adults include an individual with dementia—often requiring relatives to step into unexpected caregiving roles.

This figure rises to 37% among extended families of adults 65 and older, Overall, about 21% of older adults 65 have dementia.

Research indicates that caregiver networks assisting older adults with dementia are typically larger and more likely to include extended family members. Even if some extended family members are less likely to serve as direct caregivers, having a relative with dementia can still affect them.

University of Michigan news release, 07/31/2025

ONE COLUMN

Two-thirds of SNFs

Increased Spending on Staff

The HHS OIG, looking for a link between ownership changes and the percentage of Medicaid funds spent on direct patient care, could not confirm such a relationship.

It did discover that more than 65% of a small set (26 facilities) of studied nursing homes increased their percentage of Medicaid spent on direct patient care from 2018 to 2021.

The OIG analysis considered data mined from Payroll-Based Journal submissions and Medicaid cost reports.

Nine of the facilities were government owned, 10 were nonprofits, and seven were for-profits.

Seventeen of the 26 facilities raised their rate of spending on staff such as nurses and aides, while nine did not. Of the 17 that increased percentages of Medicaid funds spent on direct care, five were government-owned, nine were nonprofit and three for-profit.

Ironically, a dozen of the 17 that dedicated a greater portion to staff nonetheless saw their hours of nursing per patient day drop.

Those providers attributed the lower net hours per patient day to hiring and retention struggles due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the use of expensive agency nurses.

The researchers wrote, "Most of these nursing facilities attributed the increase in direct care compensation to an increase in labor costs because of the difficulties in hiring and retaining staff during the COVID-19 public health emergency (the facilities generally reported using higher wages and retention bonuses to overcome these difficulties)."

"In addition, nursing facilities had to contract for nursing staff, which also contributed to higher labor costs despite the decreases in HPRD at some of the selected facilities."

Just two of the 26 facilities changed hands during the study period, making it hard, if not impossible, to ascribe patterns to ownership habits.

McKnight's, 08/06/2025

Mass. Ready for Med Aides Nurses Are Apprehensive

Health officials are rolling out regulations to implement a 2024 law legalizing the use of certified medication aides in long-term care facilities.

Supporters say it will help address severe staffing shortages but nurses are still wary could put patients at risk.

Massachusetts Nurses Association Director of Nursing Betty Sanisidro said the union “strongly opposed... allowing medication administration by unlicensed personnel.”

However, in the wake of the law’s passage last year, Sanisidro said the union is now offering recommendations to tighten the regulations.

WWLP-TV, 08/12/2025

Program = Fewer Deaths No Readmission Bennies

A large-scale study of adults who survived sepsis found that a specialized recovery program delivered mixed results.

According to the study, the STAR program did not improve its primary goal of lowering the combined rate of death or hospital readmission within 90 days. Rates were almost identical: 48.2% for program participants versus 48.0% for those receiving usual care.

When the outcomes were examined separately, however, the study found a significant drop in deaths among STAR participants. The 90-day mortality rate was 17.3% in this group compared with 20.5% in the usual-care group.

JAMA Internal Medicine,

West Des Moines SNF Now A Special Focus Facility

Late last year, state inspectors cited Pine Acres Rehabilitation and Care Center for failing to ensure a male resident of the home received special shoes for diabetic patients and then failed to treat the resident’s worsening foot ulcers. Eventually his leg was amputated.

Pine Acres was fined \$177,240 in addition to a federal fine of \$71,169 that was

imposed eight weeks earlier for other quality-of-care violations.

In late 2023, Pine Acres was cited for 62 violations, one of which was tied to a resident who contracted gangrene in the home and had to have a leg amputated.

WVNews, 08/11/2025

Some Rural Hospitals May Be Double-Dipping into Medicare

Hundreds of urban hospitals have taken advantage of a 2016 policy change that allows them to be simultaneously classified by Medicare as rural and urban facilities for payment purposes, according to a new study.

Compared to three geographically urban hospitals that picked up dual classifications in 2017, 425 existing urban hospitals had obtained both administrative designations in 2023, Johns Hopkins University and Brown University researchers wrote in Health Affairs.

About three-quarters of these were nonprofits, and several were large academic medical centers located in metropolitan areas.

Fierce Healthcare, 08/09/2025

Possible Breakthrough in Early Detection of AD

The earliest molecular changes in Alzheimer’s disease (AD) are poorly understood Researchers have now shown that endogenous lithium (Li) is dynamically regulated in the brain and contributes to cognitive preservation during ageing.

Of the metals analyzed, scientists found that Li was the only one that was significantly reduced in the brain in individuals with mild cognitive impairment, a precursor to AD.

The research is currently confined to mice, however, replacement therapy with lithium orotate, which is a Li salt with reduced amyloid binding, prevents pathological changes and memory loss in AD mouse subjects.

Nature, 08/06/2025

Briefly in the News

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director, Susan Monarez, warned staffers about the dangers of misinformation during an agencywide meeting Tuesday, the first since last week’s shooting at the CDC’s headquarters in Atlanta, which left one police officer dead, according to a transcript of her remarks obtained by NBC News. ... She said the agency has taken steps to bolster security and expand mental health sources for employees **(NBC News)**.

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said Monday he is “reviewing” whether to remove all members of an influential advisory committee that offers guidance about preventive health services. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is composed of medical experts who serve four-year terms on a volunteer basis. They are appointed by the HHS secretary and are supposed to be shielded from political influence **(The Hill)**.

The Ensign Group has acquired 14 skilled nursing and assisted living properties across California, Iowa and Wisconsin. In addition to the aforementioned eight facilities, the company acquired three more SNFs in California that are being operated under management agreements, pending certain state regulatory reviews. The 14 acquisitions bring the Ensign Group’s portfolio to 361 healthcare operations across 17 states, **(Senior Living)**.

The Gates Foundation said it would commit \$2.5 billion through 2030 to support dozens of different approaches for improving women’s health, from new medicines to prevent maternal mortality to vaccines to curb infections that disproportionately affect women **(Stat)**.

Many seniors enjoy the perks that come with Medicare Advantage. But those extras—like dental coverage and free gym memberships—are being scaled back. Insurers are cutting benefits and exiting from unprofitable markets, and Wall Street is cheering them on. Once rewarded by investors for rapid expansion in the lucrative privatized Medicare program, companies are now being applauded for showing restraint. **(The Wall Street Journal)**.