

# IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals  
in 100 Words-or-Less

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Vol 9

11/09/2025

## They said it

*"We have all been navigating a great deal of uncertainty, and yet many organizations have had their best years ever: high occupancy, no agency staff, improved staff retention, strong balance sheets and strategic boards leaning into the future,"* President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan at the recent LeadingAge annual meeting

*"Shingles is more than just a rash—it can raise the risk of serious problems for the heart and brain"* Ali Dehghani, DO, doctor of internal medicine, said in a recent Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) news release.

*"In order to best serve the American people amid the Medicare and Marketplace open enrollment seasons, CMS is temporarily calling back all furloughed employees"* Statement from CMS prior to returning some employees to work Monday 10/27/2025

## Death & Dying! Some Stories Just Make My Day

Maine's largest health system sent letters to hundreds of patients about their deaths.

Ironically, those patients were alive enough to read them.

MaineHealth, based in Portland, is apologizing for sending letters to 531 still-living patients outlining how their surviving relatives could settle their estates.

A hospital spokesperson blamed the mass mailing of the estate vendor letters on an Oct. 20 computer glitch.

MedPage Today, 11/05/2025

*"The rumors of my demise are greatly exaggerated."* - Mark Twain

## Shutdown, Smutdown! Some Health Bills Still Alive

Legislation to regulate MA's prior authorization requirements and measures to expand telehealth coverage under Medicare are the most notable bills that have gained backers during the government shutdown.

CMS has selected the six technology companies to administer AI-powered prior authorization programs for Medicare.

The pilot – the Wasteful and Inappropriate Services Reduction model – is a CMS effort to reduce waste and abuse within the taxpayer funded health insurance program that spent more than a trillion dollars in 2024. The new prior authorization program will launch in January and run until 2031 in New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona, and Washington.

Stat, 11/07/2025

## All 50 States Seek to Transform Rural Health

All 50 states have submitted applications for the \$50 billion Rural Health Transformation Program.

CMS invited each state to design a plan for transforming its rural health care system.

Each Application must explain "how states intend to expand access, enhance quality, and improve outcomes for patients through sustainable, state-driven innovation."

The Rural Health Transformation Program is a catalytic investment designed to help states strengthen rural health infrastructure and build enduring systems of care.

The funds will be distributed over five years beginning with the federal fiscal year 2026.

CMS news release, 11/05/2025

## CMS Likely to Target More Costly Post-Acute Episodes

Medical conditions and surgical episodes requiring significant post-acute care are likely to fuel expansions of the new, bundled payment model known as TEAM.

The model is set to launch Jan. 1, when CMS will require 743 hospitals to accept bundled Medicare payments for five common surgical procedures.

The goal is to make care more efficient and drive down spending at the hospital and in the 30 days after a procedure — including when patients need skilled nursing care.

McKnight's, 11/05/2025

## Your State Converted -They May be Coming to Get You

Following the conversion of Medicaid rate-setting tools in 36 states, Medicaid offices are looking closely at how accurately providers are capturing patient characteristics that drive reimbursement.

Audits can be a tool to help officials detect higher-than-expected case-mix averages, spot upward spending trends and, possibly, target corrections.

Many states adopted a Medicaid payment system to mirror PDPM but also expected to keep overall nursing home spending the same. Audits have started in several states.

McKnight's, 11/04/2025

## V-P Dick Cheney Was a Miracle of Modern Medicine

Former Vice President Dick Cheney battled heart disease for most of his adult life, a life extended thanks in part to a heart transplant.

Cheney, who died Monday (11/03) due to cardiac and vascular disease, had his first heart attack at the young age of 37.

He would survive four more heart attacks, as well as quadruple bypass surgery, a pacemaker and an implant – a small pump called a left ventricular assist device.

In March 2012, at the age of 71, Cheney received a heart transplant.

He lived with another person's heart for 13 more years.

MedPage Today, 11/04/2025

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

**AMERICA:** At least 11 people have been sickened, including three who were hospitalized, with salmonella infections linked to powder supplements sold at Sam's Club stores nationwide and online. Member's Mark Super Greens Powder Supplements have been pulled from store shelves because they contain moringa leaf powder that may be contaminated with salmonella bacteria (**Associated Press**).

**MANHATTAN:** The Second Circuit affirmed a New York federal court's decision to grant qualified immunity to former governor Andrew Cuomo and two other officials, who were sued by the children of residents of nursing homes and adult care facilities who died of Covid-19 in the early days of the pandemic. Controversial state directives may have contributed to the 15,000 deaths at these facilities, but "the directives were a legitimate exercise of government power."

**AMERICA:** The FDA reported two types of California-grown peaches sold across the U.S. have been recalled for potential listeria contamination. The recall includes fresh white, yellow and "peppermint" peaches from Moonlight Companies which were sold at grocery stores across the country including Trader Joe's and Kroger stores such as Mariano's, Pick n Save, Metro Market, Dillons, Baker's, Gerbes, King Soopers, City Market, Fry's, Fred Meyer, Fry's, Ralphs, Food4Less, Foods Co, QFC, and Smith's stores. The peaches were sold under Kroger branding at Kroger stores (**The Hill**).

**MARYLAND:** The Department of Health has launch of an easy-to-use data tool to illustrate the combined effect of respiratory illness trends, particularly COVID-19, influenza (flu), and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) activity in Maryland. The new dashboard complements existing dashboards for respiratory illnesses, as well as provides new information, such as data on RSV vaccination rates and total deaths in the state from respiratory illness ([health.maryland.gov](http://health.maryland.gov)).

**AMERICA:** A pair of new studies highlight opportunities to reduce the

burden of vaccine-preventable infectious diseases among immigrants in the United States, with one revealing fairly high rates of influenza, mumps, and hepatitis A in immigration detention centers and the other finding that only 28.0% of immigrant and refugee adults have completed their tetanus and diphtheria vaccine series (**JAMA Network Open**).

**ENGLAND:** Rare vascular and inflammatory conditions such as blood clots, myocarditis, and pericarditis occur more often in children after COVID-19 infection than after vaccination against the disease. The study analyzed EHRs for nearly all (13.9 million) children in England. In total, 28.1% had a COVID-19 diagnosis from January 2020 to December 2022, and 36.9% of eligible children were vaccinated from August 2021 through December 2022 (**The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health**).

**AMERICA:** We are heading into winter less protected against one of the season's deadliest viruses, with, according to CSL Ltd, flu vaccination rates forecast to fall more than 10% this year. CSL, the world's second-biggest maker of the shots, expects US vaccination rates for the 2025-2026 season to drop 12% overall and 14% among people ages 65 and older compared with last year (**Bloomberg**).

**THE WORLD:** A new study links higher intercontinental airline passenger flight volumes to both influenza activity and COVID-19 case and death rates, suggesting that short-term travel restrictions and in-flight interventions could slow disease transmission when coupled with public health measures. Flights from Asia played a larger role in disease spread (**The Journal of Infectious Diseases**).

**AMERICA:** An analysis of 511 studies on US COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and influenza vaccines find meaningful protection against severe disease and hospitalization, evidence that can help fill the void in vaccine guidance

formerly provided by independent federal review. The large-scale project was conducted by CIDRAP's Vaccine Integrity Project (**New England Journal of Medicine**).

**AMERICA:** In the latest poll from the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, support among US adults for the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine has dropped from 90% to 82% in just a few short months, while confusion reigns over whether Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. recommends that children be vaccinated against measles (**CIDRAP**).

**CANADA:** The Americas — North, Central, and South — is the only region of the world that has ever managed to stop endemic transmission of measles. But that hard-won victory against the highly contagious virus is on the verge of being rolled back. The Canadian outbreak, though slowing dramatically, has not stopped, and the virus strain associated with this outbreak has now been transmitting in Canada for more than a year (**Yahoo News**).

**SPAIN:** The sequence of chronic conditions before COVID-19 infection—rather than any single condition—may best predict the development of persistent symptoms, i.e., long COVID. The most common sequences involved mental illnesses and neurologic, respiratory (eg, asthma), and metabolic or digestive diseases (eg, high blood pressure, obesity). For example, COVID-19 patients who had anxiety before depression had a different risk profile from those who had depression before anxiety (**BMC Medicine**).

### **COVID-19, 11/08/2025**

**World Total Cases**  
778,856,342

**World Total Deaths**  
7,103,185

**U.S. Total Deaths**  
1,228,289

World Health Organization

## Vaccine Advertisements May Produce Lawsuits in Florida

Florida House and Senate Republicans filed proposals that could lead to lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers that advertise in the Sunshine State.

The identical bills would allow people to sue manufacturers if they are harmed by vaccines advertised in the state.

The bills are filed for the 2026 legislative session, which starts in January.

They come amid widespread debate about vaccines, in part because leaders such as Florida Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo and U.S. Department of Health Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have expressed skepticism about at least some vaccines.

WUSF-FM, News Service of Florida, 11/06/2025

## NP Charged with Dealing Drugs Using Fake Scripts

A nurse practitioner, who police said collected more than a thousand opioid pills in a five-day span using fraudulent prescriptions, was formally charged on Wednesday.

Katherine Curtis is facing nearly 30 felony charges including drug dealing, identity deception and corrupt business influence.

Police became suspicious regarding Curtis when central Indiana pharmacies reported fraudulent prescriptions she wrote for hydrocodone and oxycodone for patients with no story of being on medication.

Police said Curtis hired other NPs to write prescriptions and would also have prescriptions for her tenants and would send them to pick them up and bring her back the pills.

MedPage Today, 11/02/2025

## Opioid Prescriptions for SNF Residents Drop Dramatically

Opioid prescriptions for nursing home residents sharply declined from 2011 to 2022 from 48.1% to 33.5%.

Researchers examined trends among more than 2.9 million unique nursing home residents with an average age of

84, from Medicare data, including Parts A, B, and D and Minimum Data Set.

Among residents who received opioids, the proportion receiving morphine milligram equivalents greater than 50 decreased from 25.1% in 2011 to 21.9% in 2022.

White residents had the highest probability of receiving opioids and MMEs. By 2022, residents who were nonwhite, regardless of pain level, were less likely to receive any opioid.

Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine, November 2025

## Voters Allow LTC Tax Dollars Investment in Stock Market

Voters gave the go-ahead Tuesday to the state to make stock market investments with payroll taxes collected for Washington's new long-term care program.

The state constitution generally bars investing public money in the stock of private companies, but pension and retirement accounts are exempt.

This vote adds the Long-Term Services and Supports Trust account to the list of exempt funds such as pension and retirement accounts.

The fund had a balance of \$2.9 billion on Sept. 30.

Washington State Standard, 11/04/2025

## Administration Leaves LTC Reliant on Outdated Guidance

Dramatic CDC changes under the second Trump administration have left providers reliant on government guidance that is nearing two years old.

That is especially problematic for older COVID response standards that are not necessarily aging well in what remains an evolving disease landscape.

For example, providers still are officially required to follow respiratory illness isolation guidance that keeps residents who have tested positive for COVID or a respiratory illness in isolation for 10 to 20 days – even if they are symptom-free.

McKnight's, 11/04/2025

## ONE COLUMN

### The Only Thing That's Certain is Uncertainty

At the LeadingAge annual meeting during the week, CEO Katie Smith Sloan lamented that the government shutdown had paused legislative efforts and some tools such as telehealth waivers have been allowed to expire.

Sloan said her team remained at work daily on pressing policy issues, even as a federal government shutdown became the longest in history, passing the 36-day mark.

Sloan noted that the workforce situation, especially in rural areas, remains dire.

"For many members, much of the workforce crisis is not what it was before. That's not true in rural America, and it's only true for a moment," she said. "Everybody is realizing that we have to figure out how to lean into technologies that can both address some of our workforce efficiencies but also improve quality."

Sloan said her team continues to press for immigration reform that will be critical for workforce growth.

To that end, LeadingAge conducted 220 visits to Capitol Hill offices in October alongside farmers, construction concerns and hospitality leaders to promote more legal pathways to immigration.

Medicaid cuts also remained a major concern for providers, nearly four months after passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and its nearly \$1 trillion in Medicaid cuts. Some states have already started rolling back Medicaid reimbursement rates due to budget constraints.

Although many facilities are "hanging by a thread" with Medicaid dependency and staffing struggles, Sloan said many organizations have had their best years ever. Occupancy is high, agency staffing is low, staff retention is up and the balance sheets are strong.

"It is truly the best and worst of times."

McKnight's, 11/04/2025

## **Survey's Coming – You Know What to Do – Just Do It**

Nursing home operators must do better to prepare for annual surveys — despite many facilities sometimes being subjected to years-long backlogs in some jurisdictions.

Often, it may simply mean remembering, and then using, tools that are available and conducting a rigid “maintenance” schedule.

All activity must be driven by steady preparation protocols, according to session speakers at the LeadingAge Annual Meeting here.

“Do your mock surveys, QAPI your findings, audit your findings, and coach and lead your teams from the improvement aspect,” advised Peggy Connerton, associate vice president of Covenant Living Communities speaking at the LeadingAge annual meeting in Boston.

*McKnight's, 11/04/2025*

## **Unlicensed Care Home Owner Off to the Slammer**

Estelle Amelia Hutchinson, 53, pleaded guilty in South Carolina to neglect, criminal conspiracy and operating a residential care home without a license. She got three years in prison.

Hutchinson confined residents to locked rooms and prevented them from accessing necessities such as food, clothing, medicine, shelter, supervision, medical services, and a safe means of egress.

Additionally, firefighters identified a malfunctioning natural gas heater in the facility that was causing a buildup of gas fumes inside the residence, requiring the immediate evacuation and venting of the residence.

*South Carolina Attorney General news release, 10/21/2025*

## **New Nursing Home for Veterans Opens in Illinois**

The final major construction project to update the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy was wrapped up with a ribbon cutting in October.

The 260,000 square foot facility provides homes for 210 residents, while another 88 residents are now residing in an 80,000 square foot independent living domiciliary.

The idea for the massive project to update the facility gained traction following a 2015 Legionnaires' Disease outbreak that was responsible for the deaths of at least 12 residents and over 50 illnesses.

*Herald-Whig, 10/20/2025*

## **Iowa Convicted Nurse Surrenders Her License**

Shari Lee Bents, an Iowa nurse, who was convicted of stealing more than \$115,000 worth coins and jewelry from a home-health patient has agreed to surrender her license.

Earlier this year, the Iowa Board of Nursing charged Bents with among other things committing an act that might adversely affect a patient's welfare; and soliciting, borrowing, or misappropriating money or property from a patient, and being convicted of an offense that directly relates to the duties and responsibilities of the profession.

Bents was employed by Stay In Home Care & Medical Staffing. Authorities say she pawned the items she stole.

*Iowa Capital Dispatch, 10/27/2025*

## **SNF to Pay \$200K to Resolve False Claims Cite**

Patapsco Healthcare, a Maryland nursing home, has agreed to pay \$200,000 to resolve allegations that it provided substandard care to residents in violation of the state's False Health Claims Act.

Patapsco will fund a \$100,000 quality improvement plan and agree to four years of monitoring and performance evaluations by a third-party consultant.

When a multi-agency state strike force performed a surprise inspection of the facility it uncovered “serious wound care inadequacies” leading to hospitalizations; failure to provide residents with adequate nutrition and hydration; regulatory violations compromising patient care; numerous preventable falls; and failure to prevent residents from overdosing on opiates.

*McKnight's, 11/06/2025*

## **Briefly in the News**

The closing of three skilled nursing and assisted living transactions in October by Cain Brothers reflects a growing shift in strategic priorities. Health systems increasingly are divesting of their legacy senior living and care properties to focus on their core operations. The three transactions involved health systems divesting their only skilled nursing or senior housing assets (*Senior Living*).

Medicare is expected to spend more than \$15 billion by year's end on pricey wound care products linked to waste, fraud, and abuse. In one particular case from this year, an 88-year-old Texas woman racked up more than \$10 million in claims. After about a month of very intense treatment from five different providers, the patient died (*MedPage Today*).

In the third quarter, Ventas the Chicago-based real estate investment trust, reported it closed on \$1.1 billion in senior living investments, and based on net operating income, its seniors housing operating portfolio, or SHOP, now represents half of its business. Ventas portfolio also includes outpatient medical and research, triple-net healthcare and institutional private capital management (*Senior Living*).

Ensign Group has acquired the operations of *The Health Center of Eastview*, a 90-bed skilled nursing facility located in Birmingham, Alabama, as well as seven SNF in Utah with a total of 338 beds. These acquisitions bring Ensign's growing portfolio to 369 healthcare operations, which includes 47 senior living operations, across 17 states (*Ensign Group news release*).

A new study from the University of Southern California suggests that the way blood pressure fluctuates from one heartbeat to the next may be just as important as the overall blood pressure reading — especially when it comes to brain health in aging adults. Researchers found that older adults who experienced greater beat-to-beat changes in blood pressure had smaller brain volumes in areas tied to memory, and higher levels of a protein linked to nerve-cell injury (*Fox News*).