



Home Health and Hospice Weekly: Recap of LeadingAge Updates

June 10, 2022

Monday Coronavirus Update Call. New vaccines, new boosters, and new variants as we head into summer, what does it all mean? On **Monday, June 13**, at 3:30pm ET, we will be joined by **Dr. Jeffrey Shaman**, professor, Environmental Health Sciences (in the International Research Institute for Climate and Society/Earth Institute), and director, Climate and Health Program, Columbia University, to discuss what we can expect and to answer your questions about new boosters and vaccines. If you haven't registered for LeadingAge Update Calls, [you can do so here](#). You can also find previous call recordings [here](#). Note that to access recordings of the calls you need a LeadingAge password. Any staff member of any LeadingAge member organization can set up a password to access previous calls and other "members only" content.

Money Follows the Person Expands Access to Short-Term Housing Assistance. A new [article](#) in Health Affairs looks at CMS' announcement from March 2022 that the Money Follows the Person demonstration will now allow participating states to pay for short-term housing assistance. Money follows the person helps states increase the use of home and community-based services by transitioning people with disabilities, including older adults, out of nursing homes. The new flexibilities can be used to support rental and utility costs along with housing-related support services. This is a recognition from CMS of the difficulties many individuals face in securing housing. The article reviews how the funds can be spent on housing search supports, paying for short-term rental assistance, and tenancy support services.

Senate Bill Would Require Study on Nurse Staffing Agencies. On June 6, Senator Kevin Cramer (R-SD) introduced legislation requiring a GAO study of nurse staffing agencies' impact on the healthcare field during the COVID-19 pandemic. LeadingAge supports this legislation. If enacted, the *Travel Nursing Agency Transparency Study Act (S. 4352)* would require GAO to conduct a study and report to Congress, within one year, on the business practices and the impact of hiring "travel" nurse agencies across the healthcare field during the COVID-19 pandemic. This LeadingAge [article](#) provides information on what the bill requires GAO to assess and links to a letter that LeadingAge and several long-term care and healthcare organizations sent to the White House COVID-19 Response Team requesting the federal government to look into exorbitant nurse staffing agency rates that came into practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article also has a link to a letter LeadingAge wrote to the FTC urging them to investigate nurse staffing agencies' conduct as a potential violation of antitrust and/or consumer protection laws. The article also links to a chart compiled by LeadingAge listing state bills that place prohibitions on price gouging by staffing agencies.

CDC Launches Heat Tracker. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its newest version of the [heat and health tracker](#), an interactive map showing the number of emergency room visits linked to heat in different counties on a weekly and daily basis. The tool also has a monthly

forecast map which displays expected number of days in the next month at or above a dangerous level of heat. Aging services providers can utilize this tool to identify older adults in areas with high rates of ED use and number of expected days above a dangerous level of heat to implement precautionary measures for older adults who may be at risk of heat related illness. Last summer, several heat waves hit multiple areas of the U.S. resulting in hundreds of deaths.

Federal Partners Take on the WEAAD 6-1-5 Challenge - World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is June 15, 2022. The #WEAAD615 challenge encourages people around the world to engage their friends, family, and colleagues by sharing facts about elder abuse and how to prevent it. This year, federal agencies will take on this challenge by sharing 6 facts about elder abuse, 1 action the agency will take, and 5 resources or tips you can use to promote elder justice. [Click here](#) to register for a virtual event on Wednesday, June 15, 1:00 - 2:00 PM ET to hear from ACL, the National Center on Elder Abuse and Senior Medicare Patrol National Resource Center, and federal partners including the Elder Justice Initiative at the Department of Justice, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Social Security Administration, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

State by State Face Mask Mandates: Over the course of the pandemic, 39 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia had orders broadly requiring people to wear masks in public. Eleven states did not impose mandates at any point. Several states, including Florida, Iowa, Montana, Tennessee, and Texas, have moved via legislation or executive action to prevent local governments and school districts from mandating. Where there are no state or local requirements, businesses and other private entities may set their own mask policies. [Here's](#) where each state stands on the use of face masks as of June

Interested in Pursuing a Master Plan on Aging in Your State? The Center for Health Care Strategies released a new tool today, [Developing a Master Plan for Aging](#). Many LeadingAge state partners and members have watched California develop, promote, and begin to take action on a Master Plan on Aging (MPA). An MPA is a cross sector, state led strategic planning resource that can help states transform the infrastructure and coordination of services for their rapidly aging population, as well as people with disabilities. Stakeholders, even those in states that might have developed more traditional aging plans in the past, see hope for more progress and organized strategies through this approach. The new tool outlines the core tenets for how to develop an MPA in your state, with best practices and state examples throughout.

Home Health News Reports on Ease in Staffing Issues. Home Health Care News [reported last week](#) that staffing issues have eased somewhat in home based care settings. The article interviewed a number of providers, including LeadingAge member Dorothy Davis of VNHS in Atlanta, about why the past 90 days have seemed a little bit better on the staffing front. They've heard from employees that inflation has had an impact on people's decisions regarding their jobs. Additionally, the contract work of traveling is becoming tiresome and people are reverting to wanting full time positions. Finally, the end of COVID relief funds of various stripes has meant that hospitals and others have had less money to pay for travel nurses. One other major factor is the retailers that were the main competition for aides – Amazon and Walmart for example – overhired during the winter Omicron surge and now are laying people off or at

least stopping hiring. While all of these trends are anecdotal, we will continue to monitor them and would love to hear from members if hiring has picked up at all.

CMS Revises Home Health Manual Removing Allowed Practitioner Section. CMS issued a [Change Request 12615](#) and new [MLN article](#) removing previous sections of the NOA requirements regarding allowed practitioners. Since March, advocacy efforts from LeadingAge in collaboration with the home health and advanced practice nurse community, pushed to revise the initial Benefits Policy Manual and an accompanying MLN article when it inaccurately summarized regulations for advanced nurse practitioners to certify eligibility and order services for home health. The passage of the CARES Act in 2021 permanently allowed nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and physician assistants to order home health. However, each state’s practice laws and regulations need to be amended in order to comply with the new federal scope of practice change. The underlying issue in the original Change Request and MLN article were statements made about “collaboration” between advanced practice nurses, physicians assistants, and physicians in states which did not have laws governing collaboration. Many states have proactively removed requirements for written collaborative agreements. CMS has stated to advocates that their intent was not to add additional “collaboration” requirements despite confusion in the article. LeadingAge will continue to work with advocacy partners to ensure that this critical change to home health policy is appropriately enacted allowing for greater access to home health services.

Affordable Connectivity Program Outreach Materials. The Federal Communications Commission has pulled together outreach tools for the Affordable Connectivity Program. Consumer awareness flyers, social media content, fact sheets, infographics, audio PSAs, a consumer FAQ, a search tool for participating internet service providers offering the Affordable Connectivity Program discount, and information on how to sign up into [one website](#). Most materials are available in English and Spanish and many are also available in Arabic, Chinese-Traditional, Chinese-Simplified, French, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

Home Health Member Network Recap Available. LeadingAge’s Home Health Member Network met on May 3, 2022, to hear from researchers at the Bipartisan Policy Center about their new home health report as well as updates on national legislation and regulatory policy. Read the full recap [here](#). For more information, please contact Katy (KBarnett@LeadingAge.org).

National Study Looks at Best Practices in Home Health, Hospice, & Personal Care. Over 1,000 home health, hospice, and personal care agencies participated in the [National Healthcare at Home Best Practices and Future Insights Study](#). This is the largest study of its kind with the goal to provide agency leaders with clinical, financial and operational best practices performed by leading organizations across the country. The study also includes a full section on staffing, recruitment, and retention. The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston participated as a steering committee member.

Report Calls for State to Raise Home Health Worker Wages. A [recent](#) report by the Economic Policy Institute found state wages for home care workers must increase to a range between \$19.58 and \$28.98

an hour. The report includes new state-by-state estimates of what home health care workers should be paid and how close each state is to meeting that wage.

Improving Access to the Application for SSI Benefits. Justice in Aging is offering a webinar tomorrow, June 8, at 2pm ET, about developments in making the application for SSI benefits more accessible for older adults. Additional information and registration is found [here](#).

Hospice Preview Reports Available on iQIES. Hospices can now access the latest Provider Preview Reports for the August 2022 Care Compare refresh via the CASPER application. Please note that the hospice preview reports contain quality measure scores for the two new Claims-based measures, which will be publicly displayed for the first time in August:

- Hospice Care Index (HCI)
- Hospice Visits in the Last Days of Life (HVLDL)

As a reminder, CMS had originally planned to release these two new claims-based measures in the May 2022 Care Compare refresh but ultimately delayed the public release to August 2022. Although the actual “preview period” is 30 days, the reports will continue to be available for another 30 days, or a total of 60 days or until June 27, 2022. CMS encourages providers to download and save their Hospice Provider Preview Reports for future reference, as they will no longer be available in CASPER after this 60-day period.

LeadingAge confirmed with CMS staff that the decision to delay in the inaugural public display of the two new hospice claims-based measures was based on technical errors in the calculation of the measure scores. CMS has since corrected these issues, and hospices can expect to see these two new measures on their preview reports, as well as on the CMS Care Compare/Provider Data Catalog sites, related to the upcoming August 2022 refresh. The August 2022 public refresh will coincide with the anticipated August 2022 introduction of the Hospice CAHPS Star Rating and there is no plan at this time to delay the 5-Star launch.

CMS Transitions Administrative Functions for HHA Enrollments and CHOWs. Effective May 27, 2022 the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [transitioned](#) certain certification enrollment functions from the CMS Survey and Operations Group (SOG) Locations (formerly CMS Regional Offices) to CMS’ Center for Program Integrity (CPI) Provider Enrollment Oversight Group (PEOG) and the Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs). Change Request 12749 that describes the transition of functions and the updated processing instructions for a home health agency’s initial form CMS-855A applications. The change request also includes updates to Change of Ownership (CHOW) and Capitalization (or the availability of sufficient funds at the time of application).

Updated 2022 Spousal Impoverishment Standards: Under the Medicaid spousal impoverishment provisions, a certain amount of the couple's combined resources is protected for the spouse living in the community. Depending on how much of his or her own income the community spouse actually has, a

certain amount of income belonging to the spouse in the institution can also be set aside for the community spouse's use. This [link](#) provides the minimum and maximum amount of resources and income that can be protected for a spouse in the community in 2022.

Nominate an Exceptional Colleague for a LeadingAge Award. The LeadingAge annual awards honor individuals who embody excellence in mission-focused aging services and merit national recognition. Nominations are being accepted in three categories: [Award of Honor](#), [RWJF Award for Health Equity presented by LeadingAge](#), and [Joan Anne McHugh Award for Leadership in LTSS Nursing](#). The deadline for nomination is June 17, 2022, so [learn more about the award criteria and submit today](#).