



## Nursing Home Weekly: Recap of LeadingAge Updates

August 21, 2020

**Defense Production Act used to prioritize nursing homes** - The US Department of Health and Human Services [announced today](#) that it would use the Defense Production Act to expedite shipments of Quidel and BD antigen testing machines to nursing homes. Through the use of the DPA, the production of antigen testing devices and test kits has significantly ramped up, allowing HHS to make good on its promise to distribute machines and test kits to every CMS-certified nursing home ahead of schedule. Distribution has now been divided into two waves, with a different methodology for each wave. Wave 1 was completed August 14. Wave 2 will be completed by September 30. Find more information on the prioritization methodology, including hotspots and nursing home information, here: <https://data.cms.gov/Special-Programs-Initiatives-COVID-19-Nursing-Home/Nursing-Home-Data-Point-of-Care-Device-Allocation/jbvf-tb74>.

**CMS resumes survey activity** - CMS announced on August 17 that they will resume survey and enforcement activity, including standard surveys, revisits, and complaints triaged from non-IJ medium up through IJ. CMS has also announced that Plans of Correction are no longer suspended, and outlined a plan for the enforcement remedies that were suspended in March. Our analysis is available [here](#). CMS has expanded the ability for state agencies to clear plans of correction through desk review and instructs survey agencies to resume on-site activity as soon as they have adequate staff and PPE to do so.

**CDC guidance on antigen testing** - CDC released [new guidance on antigen testing](#) this week. This guidance applies broadly to any provider using rapid antigen testing. We expect guidance specific to nursing homes and long-term care facilities will follow in the coming days. This new guidance acknowledges that rapid antigen testing is not as accurate as PCR testing but asserts that the testing is useful and proper interpretation of results is critical. As we were informed previously, antigen tests are most helpful when viral load is highest, generally within the first five days of infection. CDC asserts that antigen tests are useful in cases of known exposure or high-risk congregate settings when **repeat** testing can help to quickly identify infections and inform infection control procedures. Related to the question of testing asymptomatic individuals, they concede that there is limited data to guide the use of these tests with asymptomatic individuals for purposes of detecting or excluding infection. Regarding false negatives, clinical presentation and community prevalence of infection will guide interpretation of antigen test results and help to determine the need for follow up with PCR testing.

**N95 shipment of masks to nursing homes** - According to our contacts on the Supply Chain Task Force, N95 masks will be sent to the more than 3,000 nursing homes that report on the NHSN that they have a low supply on-hand. They believe they can ship them in the next 10-14 days. In addition to sending

masks directly to nursing homes, they will also direct several million masks to hot spot areas through commercial distributors.

**ACL Webinar on Engaging Older Adults during COVID – 19** -The Administration on Community Living will offer a webinar, “Successful Approaches to Creatively Engage with Older Adults during COVID-19” on Tuesday, August 25 at 3:00 PM, Eastern. The webinar will feature TimeSlips and speakers will discuss how this approach to creative engagement has been adapted to work during the pandemic. To register for the webinar, click [here](#).

**Hospitals to provide learning and technical assistance to nursing homes** - LeadingAge and AHCA have been invited by the HHS Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to partner in the design and implementation of an AHRQ effort to stand up a network of hospitals to provide learning and technical assistance to nursing homes that voluntarily seek it. This links to the reference in the HHS Provider Relief Fund [news release of August 7](#), linking Provider Relief payments to performance. Specifically, that announcement indicated that the performance based payments “...draw upon the diverse capabilities and expertise across HHS, including the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which will oversee the implementation of specialized learning networks.”

**New Commonwealth Fund Nursing Home paper** - Today the Commonwealth Fund published a paper by David Grabowski, who was the LeadingAge call on Monday. The paper, “[Strengthening Nursing Home Policy for the Postpandemic World](#): How Can We Improve Residents’ Health outcomes and Experiences?” includes recommendations like aligning reimbursement with costs, paying workers more, and encouraging more resident-centered care.

**“Skinny” relief bill in the Senate** - The Senate released a draft bill Tuesday called the “Delivering Immediate Relief to America’s Families, Schools, and Small Businesses Act.” As indicated by their announcement yesterday, this is indeed a “skinny” bill – it includes some of the [HEALS](#) provisions but not all and comes in at a price tag of about 500 billion dollars. The liability and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) provisions are the same as in HEALS. The bill includes the same language from HEALS that would allocate \$16 billion dollars for states for testing, contact tracing, and surveillance and \$20 billion for vaccine, therapeutic, and diagnostic development. However, this bill overall contains even fewer of our priorities than HEALS which itself fell short of what was needed. Notably missing from this package are the HEALS provisions that allocated an additional 25 billion for provider relief, expanded telehealth through 2021, and does not include the nursing home specific provisions. We will continue to advocate for a package that addresses the needs of aging services providers across the continuum.

**Medicare Care Compare Webinar on August 24<sup>th</sup> from 2-2:45pm ET.** CMS is making [changes](#) to help people with Medicare find information about health care providers and services, as part of the [eMedicare](#) initiative to modernize and personalize experiences with Medicare information. Care Compare on Medicare.gov standardizes 8 existing compare sites to offer users a more streamlined compare experience, improving their ability to find information about providers, including nursing homes, home health agencies, and hospices. This webinar will preview Care Compare to give partners an opportunity to learn about it before CMS launches it on Medicare.gov. While this is a preview, CMS will continue to make improvements based on ongoing feedback. To register for this webinar, visit [CMSnationaltrainingprogram.cms.gov/moodle/course/view.php?id=91](#). Space is limited. Upon registration, you'll get an email and an appointment.

**Dr. Monica Gandhi will be the guest on the 3:30 Eastern Time LeadingAge Coronavirus Update Call on Monday, August 24** - Dr. Gandhi is an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco. She has appeared in numerous mainstream national media outlets and publications in recent months. Her research focuses on asymptomatic COVID and viral load. She has been widely cited for her work on aerosol vs. droplet transmission; she promotes mask wearing to protect both the wearer and others. She will talk about these issues and other COVID-related concerns for aging services providers.

**Mental Wellbeing Resources** - As the pandemic continues, it's important for us to acknowledge the mental and emotional impact of living through a crisis. It's also important to remember that folks already living with mental health diagnoses may be struggling with more, or exacerbated symptoms. So, as we continue to walk this path, we encourage you to seek resources and support. [The Learning Hub](#) has a growing list of resources under the [Mind, Body, and Spirit topic](#), and we've curated other [trusted resources and articles](#).