



Home Health and Hospice Weekly: Recap of LeadingAge Updates

October 8, 2021

LeadingAge Coronavirus Update Call. It's not a news flash that workforce shortages are the number one issue for members across the country. Keeping current staff is also a key issue for all members. Tune in to the Update Call on **Monday, October 11 at 3:30 PM ET** to hear from LeadingAge National Board Member **Christie Hinrichs** as she discusses her organization's workforce strategies and specifically how they have utilized **WeCareConnect** to help with employee engagement and retention. On **Wednesday's** call, we will be joined by **Christian Living Communities COO Jayne Keller** as she talks about her organization's CNA mentorship program, Drive Culture webinars, and employee benefits to keep employees satisfied and motivated to work for this member community. If you haven't registered for LeadingAge Update Calls, [you can do so here](#).

NAMD Report on Opportunities for States to Transform Medicaid Long-Term Services and Supports.

The National Association of Medicaid Directors convened a working group of Medicaid executives from across the country and tasked them with identifying opportunities for State Medicaid Agencies to drive lasting transformation in their LTSS systems. The report, [Medicaid Forward: LTSS](#), outlines four broad opportunities and specific actions State Medicaid Agencies can take in order to leverage American Rescue Plan Act funds and support long-term, sustained improvements to Medicaid LTSS. NAMD will host a webinar Friday, October 8th at 12:00 PM ET. Register [here](#) for an overview of the report and insights from state leaders in Rhode Island and Tennessee.

FROM HHS:

- 1. Vaccination Linked to a Reduction of Over a Quarter Million COVID-19 Cases, 100,000 Hospitalizations, and 39,000 Deaths Among Seniors:** A new report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [shows that COVID-19 vaccinations may have helped prevent hundreds of thousands of new COVID-19 infections and tens of thousands of deaths](#) among seniors. The study, which was conducted by researchers with HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), found that vaccinations were linked to a reduction of approximately 265,000 COVID-19 infections, 107,000 hospitalizations, and 39,000 deaths among Medicare beneficiaries between January and May 2021.
- 2. Eligibility for a COVID-19 Booster Shot:** CDC [updated the "Who is Eligible for a COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shot?" page](#). Specifically, CDC provided additional information on the difference between a booster shot and an additional dose. A booster shot is administered when a person has completed their vaccine series and protection against the virus has decreased over time. Additional doses are administered to people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems. This additional dose of an mRNA-COVID-19 vaccine is intended to improve [immunocompromised people's](#) response to their initial vaccine series.
- 3. COVID-19 Vaccine Information:** CDC [updated their key things to know about COVID-19 vaccines](#) to include additional information on eligibility, effectiveness, safety, population immunity, and

variants. CDC also [updated their information for older adults](#) on the COVID-19 vaccine to include additional information on booster shots. The update also emphasized that the vaccines cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

4. **Vaccinating Patients upon Discharge from Hospitals, Emergency Departments, and Urgent Care Facilities:** CDC [released a new page on vaccinating patients](#) upon discharge from hospitals, emergency departments, and urgent care facilities. On this page, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information for state health departments and jurisdictions, as well as healthcare providers, on the administration of COVID-19 vaccinations to patients upon discharge from hospitals, EDs, and UCs.
5. **COVID-19 Emergency Declaration Blanket Waivers for Health Care Providers:** CMS [updated their information on COVID-19 emergency declaration blanket waivers for health care providers](#). The Administration is taking aggressive actions and exercising regulatory flexibilities to help healthcare providers contain the spread of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). CMS is empowered to take proactive steps through 1135 waivers as well as, where applicable, authority granted under section 1812(f) of the Social Security Act (the Act) and rapidly expand the Administration's aggressive efforts against COVID-19. As a result, blanket waivers are in effect, with a retroactive effective date of March 1, 2020 through the end of the emergency declaration.
6. **Most Vaccine-Hesitant People Remain Willing to Change Their Minds:** NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins [discussed a new study published in JAMA Network Open](#) that tracked vaccine hesitancy over time in a random sample of more than 4,600 Americans. This national study shows that vaccine hesitancy isn't set in stone. Over the course of this pandemic, hesitancy has decreased, and many who initially said no are now getting their shots. Many others who remain unvaccinated lean toward making an appointment. The survey's initial results showed that nearly 70 percent of respondents were willing to get vaccinated at the outset, with the other 30 percent expressing some hesitancy. Among the nearly 3,500 individuals who answered the survey at follow-up, about a third who were initially vaccine hesitant already had received at least one shot. Another third also said that they'd now be willing to get the vaccine, even though they hadn't just yet. Among those who initially expressed a willingness to get vaccinated, about half had done so at follow up by spring 2021 (again, some still may not have been eligible). Forty percent said they were likely to get vaccinated. However, 7 percent of those who were initially willing said they were now less likely to get vaccinated than before.

Build Back Better Reconciliation Action Alert. Please continue to share our action alert with your members. We have had over 1,000 advocates take action and we need to keep up the pressure Here is template alert text and link to share:

The Congressional Infrastructure Package Must Include Older Adults

House committees have passed bills that make significant investments to support older adults and LeadingAge members. The next step is to bring these committee bills to the House floor as one \$3.5 trillion package. NOW is the moment to ensure programs and resources are not cut as the process moves forward!

The infrastructure package must include committee-passed provisions for:

- At least \$190 billion for home and community based services to allow more older adults to get the help they need to grow older wherever they call home, including increasing pay for the staff who provide the help.
- \$2.4 billion to create 35,500 new Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly homes, new Service Coordinators, and help for states to bring services to HUD-assisted older adults.
- Fixes to the Right of First Refusal for Low Income Housing Tax Credit nonprofit owners.
- \$55 billion to increase Medicaid reimbursement for nursing homes so they can pay wages that enable them to recruit and retain staff, especially front line workers.
- \$1.5 billion investment in the aging services workforce to implement strategies to strengthen recruitment, career and training opportunities that our nation's direct care workers need to care for millions of older Americans and people with disabilities.
- \$425 million to expand allied health professions training grants for low-income recipients, that allow SNFs and nonprofit organizations to administer the programs.

Now is the time to act: send a message to your U.S. Representative and Senators today! LINK: <https://mobilize4change.org/Rv4BBTh>

Guidance on HIPAA and COVID-19 vaccination status disclosure. Since the release of vaccines last winter, we have heard concern about confirming vaccination status of employees, contractors, and visitors in different settings. In particular, we have heard concerns from nursing home members who are required to report vaccination status of any individuals providing care in the nursing home or are recommended to inquire about the vaccination status of visitors to the nursing home. HHS has released guidance to clarify when and why requesting disclosure of COVID-19 vaccination status is NOT a HIPAA violation. Check out this guidance [here](#). We note that this guidance applies only to the HIPAA Privacy Rule.

\$500M in American Rescue Plan(ARP) Fund Available for Rural Healthcare, Applications due October 12. In the middle of August, the Administration announced not only vaccine mandates for health care on the horizon but also this opportunity for funding for rural American in the Federal Register [announcement](#) of the availability of \$500M in COVID-19 ARP funds available for rural health care.

- a. Eligible entities include government entities and government owned entities; non-profits and total/urban consortiums; and tribes.
- b. There are two tracks of funds to apply for:

Track 1 - Recovery Grants – provide immediate relief to address the economic conditions arising from the COVID-19 emergency such as expanding access to COVID-19 vaccines and testing, health care services including telehealth and food assistance, food banks and food distribution in rural areas (dollars can be used for pre-award costs incurred related to COVID-19 as long as not reimbursed by other federal sources); and

Track 2 - Impact Grants - future efforts to address and support long-term sustainability of rural health care. The grants do have a matching requirement that may not make applying manageable for all rural members.

- c. Track 1 applications will be determined by each state USDA Rural Development Office, while the federal office will review Track 2 applications. More information on these two grant programs including application guides is available [here](#).

The application deadline is October 12 at 4p local time. However, USDA indicates that Track 1 grant applications will continue to be accepted after this date until funds are exhausted.

Updated Guidance on Federal Workforce Vaccine Mandate. The Safer Federal Workplace Task Force updated their [Vaccination FAQs](#) with guidance on how the federal government will address vaccinations within its workforce and provided some hints on the process it will follow for requests for exemptions to the vaccine mandate. The guidance also included templates for requesting a [medical](#) or [religious](#) exemption that federal agencies can utilize. These templates are helpful to see how the government will handle such exemption requests and we will monitor to see how these are consistent with whatever guidance that CMS issues regarding the vaccine mandate for Medicare and Medicaid providers.

Updated: Vaccine Mandates & Bans by State. We have updated the [Vaccine Mandates by State: Who Is, Who Isn't, and How?](#) article to include one additional state (Wisconsin) as well as new information we are tracking on states that are planning to pursue legal action against the Biden Administration over the Path Out of the Pandemic Plan. Click on the link provided to read more.

LeadingAge Staffing Survey: Better Pay, Vaccine Avoidance, and Temporary Staffing Agencies are Top Concerns. Staffing concerns are front and center in the daily lives of aging services providers, according to a LeadingAge pulse survey conducted in the last week of September. Using an opportunity sample, the survey helps to illustrate what the workforce crisis looks like on the ground for LeadingAge members, on a variety of issues. The survey results are also useful in our advocacy with members of Congress and the Administration, particularly since the Congressional Infrastructure Package includes billions of dollars to address the aging services national workforce crisis.

You can access an [article here](#) that provides an overview of the responses, which indicate:

- 75% of the respondents indicated staff members were leaving their organizations because they were seeking better pay, and 62% reported “avoidance of taking the vaccine” as the reason;
- 57% respondents indicated they are filling vacant positions with temporary or agency staff;
- CNAs were the most difficult positions for 52% of the respondents to recruit; and
- 42% of the respondents indicated they are experiencing significant challenges and were unable to admit residents or consumers.

An abridged version of the Staffing Survey can be accessed [here](#).

Vaccines, Including all COVID Vaccines Do Not Contain Fetal Cells. A wide range of Catholic leadership groups have issued statements clarifying that no cells from terminated pregnancies were used to make any of the COVID-19 vaccines available today. Brian Kane, Ethics Director for the Catholic Health Association of the USA explained this and answered other questions about religious exemptions on today's LeadingAge Coronavirus call. Although it is possible that cells from terminated pregnancies in 1970 were used historically for research for the vaccines. But those same historic cells were used for research supporting the development of many products used routinely today, such as Tylenol and most processed foods from companies such as Kraft and General Foods. The [Ethics and Public Policy Center issued this document](#) explaining the Catholic leadership groups' position. These groups support the use of COVID vaccines as a moral responsibility to the common good and the health of vulnerable people. Here is [an article](#) summarizing our interview with Brian Kane.

LeadingAge Releases Booster Shot Toolkit for Long-Term Care Settings. With the Pfizer booster vaccine ready for rollout to long-term care residents and staff, LeadingAge has published a toolkit to help assisted living, affordable senior housing, life plan communities, and home- and community-based

services organizations increase vaccine access. The toolkit covers four main topics, including resources for on- and off-site vaccine support, federal agency resources, and resources to get connected to vaccine-administering pharmacies. The toolkit includes compiled information on transit reimbursements for residents seeking vaccines in the broader community, educational materials from the CDC about getting vaccinated, and sample letters and surveys to get help communities get vaccine clinics set up. Some materials are available in English and Spanish, and LeadingAge has urged the CDC to make more translated materials available. LeadingAge will update the toolkit as more booster shots become available for more people. The toolkit is available [here](#).

This Week's HHS Distribution of Monoclonal Antibodies. The distributions of Monoclonal Antibodies for cycle 4 (October 4 – 10) are available [here](#). The Federal COVID-19 Response Team requests that you contact COVID19Therapeutics@hhs.gov should you have any questions or concerns regarding distribution determinations. Additionally, you may contact the distributor, AmerisourceBergen, at C19Therapies@amerisourcebergen.com should you have questions regarding the status of a shipment. HHS encourages interested stakeholders to join their weekly update calls and office calls sessions to discuss updates and answer any questions regarding the distribution and administration of mAbs. Email the team at COVID19Therapeutics@hhs.gov to join these engagements.

2022 Annual Meeting Call for Sessions. Have a great idea for a session that should be part of next year's LeadingAge Annual Meeting + EXPO, happening October 16-19 in Denver, CO? You can begin submitting proposals now! Learn more, get answers to common questions, and [complete your submission here](#).

LeadingAge Member Stories: Putting Out a Red Carpet to Recruit New Employees. [Our latest member story](#) describes how one multi-site member has adapted resident marketing principles to its staff hiring process—focusing on what potential employees need and want out of a job. LeadingAge also wants to hear your stories of practical workforce innovations; the [LeadingAge Story Collector](#), powered by Greystone, makes it easy. Submissions don't have to be perfect; LeadingAge staff will contact you to gather more details!

Thinking About Strategic Planning? You Need These Resources. Those of us who work in the aging services sector know there's never been a more important time to bolster our organization's strength. That's why LeadingAge designed these [Governance Resources for Aging Services](#) to help address the unique challenges and opportunities our members face. [Get started on your organization's governance strategy today](#).