



## Nursing Home Weekly: Recap of LeadingAge Updates

December 4, 2020

**Monday LeadingAge Coronavirus Call with Vaccine Focus.** We are weeks away from the first COVID-19 vaccines being distributed and we know that you have questions and need answers. On Monday, December 7 at 3:30 join our next Coronavirus Update Call and hear from Dr. Ruth Link-Gelles, Epidemiologist in the CDC Viral Vaccine Preventable Disease Branch, who is helping to lead the CDC Pharmacy Partnership program to ensure that aging services providers are able to get access to the vaccine. She will provide the latest updates on the program and how the first stages of vaccine distribution will begin. Educating the public about the vaccine is also critical and we will also be joined by Karyne Jones, CEO of the National Caucus and Center on Black Aging who will discuss the newly launched Vaccine Education and Equity Project and its efforts to ensure that the public is ready and willing to take the COVID-19 when it is available. If you haven't joined us before, you can register for the [call here](#).

**Relief bill in sight?** The Hill reports that House Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader McConnell held talks today about reaching a relief deal before Christmas. Pelosi told reporters "we will have agreement" on relief package funding by December 11. McConnell had said on Tuesday that additional COVID relief funding would likely be added to the omnibus spending package that will fund the federal government beyond December 11.

The Hill published an opinion piece from LeadingAge, [Emergency housing assistance for older adults needed now](#), that highlights the need to pass COVID-19 relief as soon as possible for affordable senior housing. The piece describes the need for Congress to enact HR6873/S4177, which were introduced with the coordination of LeadingAge and would provide \$1.2 billion in relief for HUD-assisted senior housing providers.

**CMS Webinar Series for Management on COVID-19 prevention.** CMS announced a live Q & A series for clinical and administrative staff and others who have taken the longer QIO training [CMS-CDC Fundamentals of COVID-19 Prevention for Nursing Home Management](#), hosted on [www.QIOProgram.org](http://www.QIOProgram.org). Sessions in the live Q & A program will be held twice a month, on Thursdays from 4:00 – 5:00 Eastern, starting Thursday, December 10. Here is the [registration link](#). Questions may be submitted in advance by email to: [DVACSupport@thebizzellgroup.com](mailto:DVACSupport@thebizzellgroup.com). Questions not addressed during the live session will be answered on the [QIOProgram.org FAQ Page](#)

**Relationship of Pharmacy Partnership to State Prioritization.** CDC has finally been able to clarify that the Pharmacy Partnership will be slightly different than the original plan, which was a direct federal program. The CVS/Walgreen's partners will have the vaccine ready to go. But the state has to dictate the priority order and CVS/Walgreen's can only start the distribution after the state says go. We are

literally just getting word at 8:30 PM 12.3.20. that although REDCap federal sign up closed on November 6, jurisdictions can still opt providers in through this Friday, December 4. Most states, according to CDC have already closed their lists – they cannot submit more providers once they've asked HHS to activate their plan (which must be done by Friday). If a provider has not signed up or has only partially signed up, and the state has activated their plan, the provider will have to get vaccine directly from the state outside of the Pharmacy Partnership program. CDC cannot release the list of states that have activated their plans because everything is tentative pending vaccine availability.

**FAQs and Resources on COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccinations.** We have been getting many questions about vaccines and vaccinations. This [FAQ document](#) addresses the commonly asked questions. We will be updating the FAQ document as guidance and policies change. We are getting lots of questions and hopefully soon we can give more answers. This is a situation where we are all working in real time to figure out – including the federal government, state governments, providers, associations, vaccine makers, pharmacies, and many more. If you have questions (and hopefully answers to some questions) on these topics, send them our way so we can make this a robust resource.

**CMS small call.** We covered a smattering of topics on our “small call” with CMS this week. No real insights, but CMS was receptive to our feedback.

**Vaccines:** We expressed concern about states de-prioritizing or sub-prioritizing long-term care residents and staff in vaccine allocations. Recall that ACIP voted to include both residents and staff of long-term care in phase 1A of vaccine allocations, but states will ultimately adopt their own prioritization strategies. We learned that under an Emergency Use Authorization, which is the most likely route of any approved vaccine initially, a state or other jurisdiction cannot mandate the vaccine. HOWEVER, CMS confirmed that nursing homes could be required to offer it and individual organizations could choose to make it a condition of employment, provided they have that option. It is important to note that a vaccine WILL NOT return operations to pre-COVID times. Source control measures like masking and social distancing will continue to be required. We may see changes to guidance on visitation or testing, but these changes will not be immediate. CMS will take a strategic approach to evaluating and revising guidance in a way that continues to prioritize the safety and well-being of residents and staff.

**Testing:** We shared concerns that we have been hearing about significant barriers to testing, including lack of access to testing including point-of-care testing and lack of access to timely test results from lab tests. We pointed out the added strain that as cases in the community rise, these barriers become more pronounced. We also noted that due to community spread, some nursing homes must test all staff and residents continuously in order to meet requirements related to county positivity rates and outbreaks. We note that news outlets have reported recently that HHS may issue changes to lab data reporting methods; CMS was unable to comment other than to say that no changes have been finalized at this time.

**Vaccines: important upcoming dates.** HHS sent this list of important upcoming dates:

December 4: Deadline for jurisdictions to tell CDC/OWS where they want their first allocations of vaccine to be delivered.

December 10: FDA's Vaccine Advisory Board meets to review the clinical trial data on Pfizer vaccine and make a recommendation on whether to grant an EUA

December 11: Deadline for jurisdictions to tell CDC/OWS where they want their second allocations of vaccine to be delivered.

December 17: FDA's Vaccine Advisory Board meets to review the clinical trial data on Moderna vaccine and make a recommendation on whether to grant an EUA

**Some good news on telehealth.** [CMS finalized the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Rule](#) In the rule, CMS added more than 60 services to the Medicare telehealth list that will continue to be covered beyond the end of the PHE, and we will continue to gather more data and evaluate whether more services should be added in the future. However, the permanent expansions made by the rule are limited to the pre-pandemic telehealth rules regarding geographic location and originating site – CMS is clear in the rule they cannot expand coverage beyond rural areas and to the home without Congress. The rule also contains provisions regarding professional scope of practice and supervision and payment for office and outpatient evaluation and management codes

**Nursing Home Infection Control Incentive Payments:** Nicole has submitted roughly 70 nursing homes to HHS who has finally agreed to research and provide info on why the nursing home did not receive a payment. We are told we will receive this information no later than late next week. Nicole compared our list to the HHS [list](#) of September incentive payment recipients published yesterday and found 14 of these nursing homes on the list of those who “received” a payment. She has contacted each of them to let them know this updated status and ask them to check their bank accounts for the payments. If they have not received the payment, Nicole will follow up with HHS to remedy the situation.

We are now hearing from other members who did not receive a Sept. Incentive payment (paid on 11/2 and 11/30). We do not know if we will be able to submit additional nursing homes to HHS to research the reason a payment wasn’t received. HHS has said it will NOT recalculate payments from previous periods. We are hoping that once we hear back regarding the reasons for missing payments that we may see an error trend that we can seek to correct with HHS, in the hopes of them revisiting the issue of Sept. incentives. Nursing homes not on the list, should double check that they meet all of the HHS [criteria](#) and have confirmed their NHSN data was entered for the relevant 10-week period.

**Face Masks, Including Surgical Masks and Respirators.** FDA published [Face Masks, Including Surgical Masks, and Respirators for COVID-19](#), a comprehensive new page on FDA.gov with answers to frequently asked questions about face masks, surgical masks, and respirators. The topics covered in this new page include:

- The basics on face masks, surgical masks, and respirators
- Using face masks, surgical masks, and respirators
- Shortages of face masks, surgical masks, and respirators during COVID-19
- The Emergency Use Authorizations for face masks, surgical masks, and respirators
- Manufacturing and importing face masks, surgical masks, and respirators during COVID-19
- Purchasing or donating face masks, surgical masks, and respirators during COVID-19
- Reporting shortages or problems with face masks, surgical masks, or respirators

**LeadingAge Coronavirus Congressional Briefing.** Thursday’s hosted Congressional Briefing was a huge success. We had 88 attendees and a variety of U.S. House and Senate congressional staffers attended. They heard compelling and heartbreaking stories from Amber Taoko, LPN at St. Paul Elder Services in Wisconsin, Scott LaRue, CEO of ArchCare in New York City, Mary Lynn Spalding, CEO of Christian Care Communities in Kentucky and Dorothy Davis, CEO of Visiting Nurse Health System in Georgia. LeadingAge staff made our key congressional asks during the briefing urging relief for testing, PPE, staffing pay, affordable housing, liability protection and a national plan for vaccines. The recording of the briefing can be [viewed here](#).

**Annual Meeting Virtual Experience is Now On-Demand.** Thanks to all of you who attended the [2020 Annual Meeting Virtual Experience](#)! Attendees will have access to the virtual platform and on-demand content through April 30, 2021. If you were not able to join us for the live event, you can register for on-demand access at a [discounted rate](#) and take a look at [video highlights](#) from the event.

**Summer Enrichment Program.** LeadingAge's [Summer Enrichment Program](#) is designed to grow, strengthen, and diversify the pipeline of aging services leaders. LeadingAge is seeking provider organizations to host a paid student internship beginning in the summer of 2021. Internship opportunities go live this week, so apply today by completing the [host site application](#). Questions? [Contact Christy Kramer](#).

**New Insights and Tools From LeadingAge.** LeadingAge staff experts are developing essential advocacy, guidance and tools, and curating the most relevant resources for aging services providers on COVID-19 and beyond, including:

[How States are Providing Assistance With Staffing in Long Term Care](#)  
[FAQs and Resources on COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccinations](#)

A complete [timeline of insights, tools, and useful COVID-19 links is available here](#), so you'll never miss an update.

**Communicating About COVID-19.** As COVID-19 surges nationwide and aging services providers bear the brunt of the pandemic, now more than ever it's crucial that members maintain transparent communication about positive cases with staff, residents, and families. We created templates, draft statements, messages and a full set of [COVID Crisis Communications Tools](#), as well as advice and talking points for [Responding to Negative Narratives](#).

**Learn From Peers with the Pandemic Playbook.** We are beginning what experts say will be the worst phase of the pandemic. The [Pandemic Playbook](#) is an interactive collection of insight, wisdom, and best practices for serving older adults during a catastrophic health crisis like the one we're facing. The Playbook will help ensure that aging services providers can prepare for and mitigate the impact of a pandemic in the future—and can help you apply the learning from this year. Visit the Playbook now at [playbook.leadingage.org](#).