



## Home Health and Hospice Weekly: Recap of LeadingAge Updates

May 20, 2022

**LeadingAge Update Calls. What's going on with variants? If a person has had one variant can they be infected with a similar one? Does the current booster protect against coming variants? What are the clinical considerations of getting "back to normal?"** Join the LeadingAge Update Call on **Monday, May 23 at 3:30 PM ET**, as we talk with infectious disease specialist **Dr. Salman Ashraf**, Medical Director of the Nebraska Department of Health, Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance Program. He will cover all these topics and other recent changes and medical developments related to COVID-19 and older adults. Of course, he will also answer your clinical and infectious disease/infection prevention questions related to all aging services settings and services.

Many look to private long-term care insurance as a potential, partial solution to finance care. But the industry is contracting at a rapid rate. On **Wednesday, May 25 at 3:30 PM ET**, we will be joined by **Dean Cameron, President of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC)** (and Director of the Idaho Department of Insurance). who will offer his and NAIC's views on how LTC insurance might be made more viable and describe NAIC's other proposals related to paying for long-term care. 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.

**Medicaid Continuous Enrollment Unwinding: What to Know and How to Prepare:** Over the COVID-19 public health emergency, the federal government eased rules to prevent people with Medicaid from losing their health coverage. However, at some point states will be required to restart Medicaid eligibility reviews. During this webinar, hosted on May 25<sup>th</sup> from 12:00 – 1:00 PM ET, CMCS will provide an overview of resources currently available for providers to help prepare Medicaid beneficiaries for the Medicaid redetermination process. RSVP [here](#) and send questions you would like to be addressed in the webinar to [PARTNERSHIP@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:PARTNERSHIP@cms.hhs.gov).

**Another Batch of PRF Phase 4 Payments Distributed:** Today, some members are reporting that they have received their long-awaited Phase 4 payments. We have seen no official confirmation from HRSA or HHS on how much was sent out or to how many providers but we know that prior to today, \$3B of the Phase 4 funds remained and roughly 6% of applications were still pending review. We will share additional information when we receive confirmation. In the meantime, members who have not yet received a Phase 4 payment should check their bank account to see if they were included in this latest distribution.

**Public Health Emergency likely to continue beyond July 16.** The current extension of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) is due to end on July 16. When it does end there are implications for Medicare, Medicaid and the CHIP program – for states, providers, and beneficiaries. However, HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra committed to giving states and others 60 days notice if the PHE is not going to be

renewed. Since May 16 passed with no notice, it is reasonable to expect that it will be renewed once again.

**Weekly update from HHS on Therapeutics.** [Here](#) is the slide deck from the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) on Distribution and Administration of COVID-19 Therapeutics. This week it includes details about new test to treat sites.

**Additional Free At-Home, Rapid COVID-19 Tests.** The Biden Administration is announcing that [www.COVIDTests.gov](http://www.COVIDTests.gov) is now open for a third round of ordering. People who have difficulty accessing the internet or need additional support placing an order can call 1-800-232-0233 (TTY 1-888-720-7489) to get help in English, Spanish, and more than 150 other languages—8am to midnight ET, 7 days a week. For more information, people can visit: <https://www.covid.gov/tests/faq>.

**CMS Releases New OASIS-E Draft.** CMS has [updated](#) the draft Guidance Manual for the OASIS-E version of the OASIS data set, effective January 1, 2023. A log of changes since last posting is also [available](#). The instrument is not yet final. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval is required and expected later this year. LeadingAge submitted comments on the proposed OASIS-E changes in home health. We asked for OASIS-E to be delayed until CY2024 and cited the current workforce shortage and competing pressure with home health value-based purchasing implementation. Those comments can be found [here](#).

**OIG Looking at Home Health Falls Reporting.** In April 2022, a new OASIS-based measure for falls with major injuries for home health agencies was publicly released on Care Compare; Percent of Residents Experiencing One or More Falls with Major Injury. This month OIG [added](#) a study to their work plan to assess accuracy of home health agency reporting on falls in OASIS. The report will use Medicare claims to identify hospitalizations due to falls with major injury and the analysis will look the extent to which falls were reported on OASIS. The report will include a description of the beneficiary characteristics who did not have falls reported as well as characteristics of home health agencies that have low falls reporting rates. The report will be issued in 2023.

**Study Finds Hospice Comfort Medications Have Great Variation.** A new study from the University of Michigan [looked](#) at two types of medication often used to support individuals with anxiety, agitation, delirium and other symptoms while on hospice. The two categories of drugs reviewed were benzodiazepines and antipsychotics. There has been concerted effort to reduce the use of these drugs in older adult populations, but little research has focused on their use in hospice. The study reviewed 400,000 Medicare beneficiaries who had not been prescribed these types of medications in the prior 6 months. The research found 54% of patients in the 4,300 hospices studied filled a prescription for a benzodiazepine and 31% filled an antipsychotic while on hospice. The greatest predictor of whether a patient was prescribed one of these medications was if they received care from a high prescribing hospice agency, not a patient's clinical characteristics. The study also revealed differences between non-profit and for-profit hospice prescribing trends and racial and ethnic variations by patients.

**New [Provider Relief Fund page](#) on LeadingAge website.** LeadingAge has co-located all articles, tools, letters and resources on Provider Relief Funds on a single web page to make it easier for members to

find the key dates and information they need. Members can find a [link](#) to the page on the Coronavirus Resources page under Provider Resources in the left-hand column.

**ATI Advisory issues new [Roadmap](#) on Advancing Integration through Medicaid.** Service and Care Integration is a long-held LeadingAge goal. This recent ATI Advisory report discusses how CMS and Medicaid agencies can remove barriers and revise current structures to further this important change to care and service delivery and result in better outcomes for dual eligibles. Many of the recommendations are similar to policies LeadingAge has been advocating for to ensure a whole-person approach to addressing an individual's needs. The recommendations cover both FFS and managed care changes. A summary of the recommendations can be found on p. 7 of the [report](#).

**LTQA Briefing on Non-Medical Supplemental Benefits in MA.** The Long-Term Care Quality Alliance hosted a webinar to share the ATI Advisory [insights](#) about the trends in non-medical health-related supplemental benefits and special supplemental benefits for the chronically ill (SSBCI) being offered by Medicare Advantage and Special Needs Plans. Roughly 24% of MA/SNP plans nationally are now offering these SSBCI benefits with the most commonly-offered benefits being in-home support services, food and produce, Meals (beyond a limited basis), non-medical transportation and pest control. LTQA also shared its [policy recommendations](#) which include seeking to expand eligibility criteria for these supplemental benefits to include individuals with functional limitations and social risk factors; implement requirements and incentives for plans to report on SSBCI utilization and fund a required evaluation of non-medical benefits looking at which benefits are being utilized and by whom, and the effect the benefits are having on enrollee outcomes and overall cost. The webinar participants also heard from several speakers and panelists, including Dr. Meena Seshamani, CMS Director of Medicare; and LeadingAge LTSS Center at UMASS Boston's own, Mark Cohen.

**Financial resources for consumers in multiple languages.** Limited English proficiency and lack of familiarity with the US financial system can make it hard to navigate the financial marketplace. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau released [consumer materials](#) suitable for sharing with residents/clients/consumers or staff in multiple languages this month. Some of the documents are targeted to older adults, including Money Smart for Older Adults; Placemats for use in meal programs; Before you Claim Social Security – calculator; and Reverse Mortgages, a Discussion Guide. All of these particular documents are available in both English and Spanish. Other materials from CFPB are in Chinese, Haitian Creole, Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, and Arabic.

**Grantmakers in Aging (GIA) webinar on empathy in delivery of telehealth.** Grantmakers in Aging (GIA) invites all interested individuals to a free webinar on May 26 at 1:00 PM ET. "Conversations with GIA: Conveying Empathy from a Distance: Using E-empathy in Goals of Care Conversations" will feature details about a training program on conveying empathy while using telehealth. The training focuses on evidence based practices and patient feedback to provide health care professionals concrete skills and examples scenarios to build empathic, trusting relationships when communicating with seriously ill individuals via telehealth. For registration and more details, click [here](#)

**COVID-19 Funding Action Alert For Members.** Congress Must Pass New COVID-19 Funding Now! With COVID-19 cases, test positivity rates, and hospitalizations again on the rise, the country is not past the pandemic. Now is the time to ask Congress to fully fund additional support for the nation's ongoing efforts to fight COVID-19—especially for older adults who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Experts are predicting new surges in the late Summer and Fall but additional funding is needed to make sure the country has enough vaccines, boosters, tests, and treatments to meet projected needs. We know the tools we need to confront COVID-19; Congress must act now so communities across the nation are prepared to deal with the coming surges.

We must ensure that test kits and testing locations remain available and accessible to everyone who needs them and that vaccines (including boosters) are readily available and robustly promoted. Treatments and therapeutics must also be easy to find and access, while research to find new tests, vaccines, and treatments continue. Please take two minutes to write to your members of Congress now and advocate for more COVID-19 relief. Link:

<https://www.votervoice.net/LeadingAge/campaigns/94910/respond> Thank you!

**Congressional Update.** Both the House and Senate are in session this week with Senators returning to consider a [\\$40 billion Ukraine aid package](#). The Ukraine funding measure was held up last week by Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) who objected to fast-tracking the bill without language requiring an inspector general to oversee Ukraine funding. Senator Paul's objection blocked a rare moment of bipartisan agreement among Senate Leaders and ultimately slowed down the Senate's consideration of the bill, which [passed the House of Representatives](#) overwhelmingly on Tuesday, May 10. The Senate is expected to move to final consideration of the bill later this week.

Unfortunately, the delay in passing the Ukraine funding bill is also expected to delay work on the already stalled [COVID-19 funding package](#) that is needed to finance additional vaccines, testing, and therapeutics. A bipartisan \$10 billion compromise measure was derailed in April after Republicans sought an amendment to retain a border control policy known as Title 42 that has kept migrants out of the U.S. during the pandemic. Although this issue remains a sticking point, reporting from the Hill suggests that there may be growing willingness to address it by holding an amendment vote on Title 42 or finding an alternative path through further negotiations. While the path in Congress to more pandemic-related funding remains a little murky at the moment, the need for it is crystal clear. LeadingAge put out an action alert on Friday calling on Congress to pass more COVID-19 funding. [More information can be found here.](#)

**CDC updates on vaccine storage.** Last Friday, LeadingAge participated in a call with CDC to discuss vaccine storage. CDC shared resources on COVID-19 vaccine storage:

- [Vaccine Storage and Handling Toolkit \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)
- [FAQs About Implementing COVID-19 Vaccination Program in Provider Practices | CDC](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs for Healthcare Professionals | CDC](#)

In addition, boosters were discussed and the following question arose and was answered by CDC:

**Q: For those eligible to receive a second booster dose now, will they be able to get another one this fall?**

**A:** FDA and CDC will continue to discuss the data and need for a booster dose this fall. We anticipate those who choose to get a second booster now may still need additional doses later this year, if authorized. In the meantime, with cases of COVID-19 rising again in some parts of the world—and the possibility that the U.S. will experience another uptick in COVID-19 cases in the coming months—this update allows these individuals the option to increase their individual protection now. Another booster dose could help restore protection that may wane over time and provide peace of mind for those who want optimal protection as soon as possible.

**White House briefing on Bipartisan Infrastructure law for all interested participants.** The White House is hosting an open meeting on the Bipartisan Infrastructure law tomorrow, May 17 at 2:00 PM ET. It will include a discussion of funding opportunities to implement the law. [Here is the link](#) to register for the webinar. Funds awarded under this law can cover the expansion of high-speed internet. The session is not specific to aging services but will include some general information members might find pertinent.

**New publications on support programs for caregivers of veterans.** The Veteran’s Administration released two new publications about caregiver support programs. The first is the Program of General Caregiver Support Services, a clinical program that empowers caregivers by offering resources that sharpen their caregiving skills and support their personal growth, health, and well-being. The second is the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, that offers enhanced clinical support to family caregivers of eligible veterans who have a serious injury or illness and require in person personal care services. More information and links to the new publications are [here](#).

**Eight Steps to Achieving the Impossible.** How do you tackle what may seem to others as impossible, daunting, and overwhelming? LeadingAge CAST’s Majd Alwan [shares his thoughts](#) on how LeadingAge members have persevered through challenges like the pandemic, the “great resignation,” and significant shortage of workers—and have achieved the impossible: kept residents safe, healthy, well taken care of, engaged, and happy leading their lives. [Read Majd’s message](#).

**Webinar: Challenges for America’s Older Adults to “Age My Way”** Join fellow leaders in the aging services field for an hour-long exploration of the two barriers facing older adults’ ability to “Age My Way”: lack of awareness of existing aging services and the crisis in access to care and support. [Join us to hear from experts](#) in home and community-based care, the aging services workforce, affordable housing, and federal policy—and to be part of our online discussion of the way forward. We are bringing dynamic, insightful solutions to the table – and we need to work together to generate the political will for change. [Join the conversation!](#)