



- 1. Medicare Sequester bill signed and CMS releases MLN on sequestration suspension continuation:** President Biden signed the Medicare sequester bill on Wednesday, which suspends the 2% Medicare reimbursement cut ("the sequester") through the end of 2021. This applies to all Medicare billers, including home health, hospices, PACE organizations and NFs.. An article is [here](#).

Medicare announced a delay in payments for services on/after April 1 in anticipation of this legislation and CMS issued a new MLN on April 16<sup>th</sup> that says:

*The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act suspended the sequestration payment adjustment percentage of 2% applied to all Medicare Fee-for-Service (FFS) claims from May 1 through December 31, 2020. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, extended the suspension period to March 31, 2021. An Act to Prevent Across-the-Board Direct Spending Cuts, and for Other Purposes, signed into law on April 14, 2021, extends the suspension period to December 31, 2021. Medicare Administrative Contractors will:*

- *Release any previously held claims with dates of service on or after April 1*
- *Reprocess any claims paid with the reduction applied You don't need to take any action.*

***Providers do not need to take any action.***

- 2. Proposed Hospice FY 2022 Wage Index Rule Released; includes a Home Health Quality Reporting Program Update** The FY 2022 Proposed Hospice Wage Index and Payment Rate Update, Hospice Conditions of Participation Updates, Hospice and Home Health Quality Reporting Program Requirements was released this afternoon. The proposed increase to the hospice payment rate is 2.3% (\$530 million dollars in increased payment to hospice providers) and there are proposed changes to the hospice program that include permanency of certain 1135 waivers, changes to the proposed labor shares of the hospice payment rates, clarifications and clarifying regulation text changes related to the hospice election statement addendum, and asks for comments on hospice utilization and spending patterns.

Additionally, the rule proposes to update the Hospice Quality Reporting Program by adding the claims-based Hospice Care Index and the Hospice Visits in the Last Seven Days of Life Measure for public reporting, removal of seven HIS measures because CMS sees them as duplicative of other measures being reported, and contains more information on the development of the Hospice Outcome and Patient Evaluation (HOPE) assessment instrument. The rule also has a proposal related to the home health quality reporting program so that timely comments can be received prior to implementation. The proposed rule can be found [here](#). Our summary of the rule can be found [here](#). Comments are due by June 7 and LeadingAge will organize opportunities for members to provide feedback.

- 3. NO UPDATE CALL ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21 – It's LeadingAge Virtual Lobby Day! Calls on Monday and Thursday at 3:30 to feature new Johnson and Johnson information as it emerges from CDC, as well as a look at a county public health system that has figured out how to find**

**and vaccinate homebound people and some new tools for infection control.** On Monday, April 19, Maureen Linehan from the King County (WA) Public Health Department will talk about how her agency geared up to find homebound older adults and got them vaccinated. Callers from other locations will find ideas worth talking to their own public health departments about. On Thursday, Lisa Thomson and Sue LaGrange from LeadingAge Partner Pathways Health will join us to talk about the new infection control toolkit. The best practices learned during the pandemic will be applicable well beyond the nursing home setting. If you haven't registered for Update Calls and wish to, you can do so [here](#).

- 4. Johns Hopkins Recruiting for Study on Home Care Workers and Vaccines.** JHU is conducting a study investigating factors that impact COVID-19 vaccine uptake. They are looking for individuals who provide in-home care to discuss considerations regarding COVID-19 vaccine awareness, access, and acceptance. The discussions consist of 90-minute focus groups that are hosted remotely (web-based). Participants are compensated with a \$50 Amazon gift card emailed at the conclusion of the session. Please see [this flyer](#) for more information and to sign up.
- 5. New QuickCast on the Hub. [Improving Communication with Older LGBTQ+ Adults](#)**  
*In this 10-minute QuickCast, Carey Candrian outlines how the way we talk, and listen can make a measurable difference in the care older LGBTQ+ adults receive and in their health outcomes. A hospice example is featured in the QuickCast.*
- 6. More detail on Administration's HHS Budget.** [here](#) is an article with more detail on the HHS proposals.
- 7. Virtual Lobby Day Resources.** Every registered attendee will receive a link to access the Advocacy Day meeting platform that will have individual schedules, talking points, resources and connections to other meeting attendees. Here are some links to some other key resources:
  - LeadingAge Virtual Lobby Day Talking Points and Resources: [www.leadingage.org/lobby-day-2021](http://www.leadingage.org/lobby-day-2021)
  - Open Office Hours For Questions and Lobby Day Information – 2pm Eastern on Friday, April 16<sup>th</sup> and Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup> – [Zoom Link Here](#)
  - Recording of the Know Before You Go Lobby Day Training [is here](#)
- 8. Interview with Josh Sharfstein about Johnson & Johnson pause.** Thursday on our 3:30 Update call, Josh Sharfstein, Vice Dean for Public Health Practice and Community Engagement at Johns Hopkins University and former Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Principal Deputy Commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and Commissioner of Health for Baltimore City, spoke about the J & J vaccine pause and the implications for aging services providers, including those whose residents/patients have already received this vaccine. [Here's an article](#) summarizing the interview. In short, the decision was made out of an abundance of caution and older adults who have received the J & J vaccine probably "have other things that are more important to worry about." Dr. Sharfstein has been interviewed widely in the media on this topic over the past few days.
- 9. Biden Nominee Updates:** On Thursday, the Senate Finance Committee held a nominations hearing for Chiquita Brooks-LaSure (nominee for CMS administrator) and Andrea Palm (nominee for Deputy HHS Secretary). You can watch a replay of the hearing at the link that follows.

Senator Whitehouse reiterated his commitment to an advanced illness model and Ms. Brooks-LaSure committed to working with him on the issue. Senators Casey, Menendez, Brown, and Hassan raised the importance of expanding home and community-based services. Chairman Wyden and Senator Brown both talked about promoting parity between traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage; Chairman Wyden talked about another chronic care package to achieve this goal. Senator Hassan also talked about the experience of home health aides during COVID and got commitments to work on issues for those workers as well. Hearing web page: <https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearing-to-consider-the-nominations-of-andrea-joan-palm-to-be-deputy-secretary-of-health-and-human-services-and-chiquita-brooks-lasure-to-be-administrator-of-the-centers-for-medicare-and-medicaid-services>

- 10. USDA is Soliciting Applications for Telemedicine Grants: Due June 4, 2021.** The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is soliciting applications for their **Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) grant program**. Aging services organizations can apply for this grant to buy the equipment and software necessary to deploy telemedicine services to rural residents. Grant funds may be used for: Acquisition of eligible capital assets, such as: Broadband facilities; Audio, video and interactive video equipment; Terminal and data terminal equipment; Computer hardware, network components and software; and Inside wiring and similar infrastructure that further DLT services. Acquisition of instructional programming that is a capital asset. Acquisition of technical assistance and instruction for using eligible equipment. Applications must be **submitted electronically** through grants.gov no later than **June 4, 2021**
  
- 11. Vaccine Guidance and Resources for People with Disabilities and Older Adults:** As part of a shared commitment to President Biden's [National Strategy - PDF](#) and [Executive Order](#) to ensure an equitable COVID-19 response, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the Administration for Community Living (ACL), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at HHS have [published several new resources to help states, vaccination providers, and others leading COVID-19 response activities](#) improve access to vaccines for people with disabilities and older adults. These resources clarify legal requirements, illustrate some of the barriers to vaccine access faced by people with disabilities and older people, and provide strategies – and examples of how the aging and disability network can help employ them – to ensure accessibility. The Office for Civil Rights released [new guidance - PDF](#) outlining legal standards under the federal civil rights laws prohibiting disability discrimination and providing concrete examples of the application of the legal standards in the context of COVID-19 vaccine programs and how to implement them. OCR also issued a [fact sheet - PDF](#) setting out specific steps that those involved in the planning and distribution of vaccines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic may wish to consider to promote compliance with disability rights laws and provide access to vaccination programs for people with disabilities. Earlier COVID-19 guidance from OCR addressed [civil rights protections prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin - PDF](#), and [civil rights of persons with limited English proficiency - PDF](#).