Media, Digital, & Influencer Scan

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS & INTERVIEWS

Opening Doors to Aging Services
Methodology

This presentation includes findings from online research, as well as insights from policy experts, academics, organizations, and leaders active in the aging services sector.

LeadingAge staff and research partners Ward Circle Strategies and 3W Insights led this phase of the research.

3W Insights conducted seven interviews via teleconference with policy experts between April 7 and April 15, 2021. Each discussion lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Ward Circle Strategies interviewed academics on March 10, 2021. The interviews were conducted via teleconference and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Using natural language processing techniques, researchers scanned ~29,000 articles related to aging services that ran between January 2020, and July 2021 to identify frequently mentioned stakeholders and issues impacting older adults and the aging services sector.
Media & digital scan
COVID-19 put a spotlight on nursing homes

“Nursing home” search trend; Google Trends data
National media coverage; Mediacloud.org
COVID Deaths in Long-Term Care Facilities; Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Numerous COVID challenges emerged...

Nursing Homes Are Getting Billions in COVID Aid — Where Is It Going?
Facilities are calling for more assistance, but industry experts want answers
by Andrew Soergel, AARP, November 24, 2020  |  Comments: 5

Most nursing homes say they won't be able to stay open another year due to pandemic costs
Increased staffing, personal protective equipment and testing contributed to the mounting financial crisis that could jeopardize the care of thousands of older Americans, many of whom are women.

Is Extended Isolation Killing Older Adults in Long-Term Care?
Five months of COVID-19 lockdowns have created a mental health crisis
by Emily Paulin, AARP, September 3, 2020  |  Comments: 56
Private equity ownership is killing people at nursing homes
A new study describes the human toll of private equity firms buying up nursing homes.

By Dylan Scott | @dylanscott | dylan.scott@vox.com | Feb 22, 2021, 4:30pm EST

Maggots, Rape and Yet Five Stars: How U.S. Ratings of Nursing Homes Mislead the Public

Nursing homes have manipulated the influential star system in ways that have masked deep problems — and left them unprepared for Covid-19.

The New York Times
COVID damaged nursing homes reputationally

How has your perception of U.S. nursing homes changed during the course of COVID-19 crisis?

- 54% My opinion of nursing homes has worsened
- 43% My opinion has remained the same
- 3% My opinion has grown more favorable

Margin +/- 3% 1749 responses from 5/13/2020 to 05/15/2020
Generated by CivicScience® on May 15, 2020 at 16:40:46 EDT
Assisted living also suffered a reputational hit.
As did senior housing

Overall, 65% of respondents to the SNN/CivicScience poll said that they were less likely to pursue senior housing for themselves or a loved one in the wake of COVID-19.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Less Likely</th>
<th>Not Changed</th>
<th>More Likely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 (12%)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34 (15%)</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-54 (31%)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 or older (42%)</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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1070 responses. Significance: $X^2_{(df=0)} = 66.344, p<0.001$, High Strength of Association ($T=0.159$)

Generated by CivicScience® on May 18, 2020 at 15:41:41 EDT
Signs of improvement after COVID-19 battering

Drop in concerns about nursing homes

Americans very or extremely concerned about a loved one needing long-term care in a nursing home.

Source: AP-NORC poll, Feb. 12 – March 3, 2021
Public perception of nursing homes and long-term care is staid, but positive

Question: Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? ¹

I believe most nursing homes in my local area would take good care of me or my loved ones
n=1,001

- Agree: 53%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 33%
- Disagree: 15%

Placing a loved one in a nursing home or long-term care facility shows disrespect for that person
n=1,001

- Agree: 11%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 28%
- Disagree: 62%

Source: Post-Acute Care Collaborative 2021 Consumer Survey and analysis
Twice as many Americans agree nursing homes safer now than before COVID. Half unsure.

**Question:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Nursing homes are safer now than they were before Covid-19

n=1,001

- Agree: 49%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 35%
- Disagree: 17%

*Source: Post-Acute Care Collaborative 2021 Consumer Survey and analysis*
Discussion shifts to building a better system and more public investment

COVID-19 Exposed the Faults in America’s Elder Care System. This Is Our Best Shot to Fix Them

Workers and seniors deserve investments in home care infrastructure

Will COVID-19 Improve Long Term Care?

Care infrastructure ‘vital for our economic prosperity,’ Commerce Secretary Raimondo says
Action at multiple levels for better system
Influencer views
Who is driving a lack of trust in the field?

- News media reporting negative stories
- Advocacy organizations
- Social media influencers
- Other influencers in the space
- Policymakers
Criticism of nursing homes during pandemic

“The nursing home industry has been aggressive in shifting the blame and in trying to avoid the financial consequences of the deaths in its facilities...data is beginning to show linkages between nursing home quality and coronavirus cases. Risks may be even worse at for-profits run by private-equity firms, which acquire nursing homes, cut costs and then sell at a profit.” AARP

“After months of devastation for residents and their families, I have yet to hear a single apology, a single provider say 'We have learned, and next time we’ll do better.'” Richard Mollot, executive director of Long Term Community Care Coalition

“It seems like bad practice to put 150 people in their 80s together in tight quarters, two to a room, sleeping four feet away from each other. That’s about the worst thing you can do.” Eric Carlson, attorney for Justice in Aging

“Nursing homes are pillaging taxpayers while the body bags continue to mount.” Families for Better Care

“I consistently read horror stories from around the country of nursing homes that could have done better to protect their residents...We must ensure nursing home residents are not harmed because of deficiencies in the facilities they rely on to survive...What is the answer for our elders?” Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9)

“The next time there’s a pandemic, seniors shouldn’t be stuck in subpar institutions run by greedy CEOs and vulture firms in order to make a quick buck.” Sen. Elizabeth Warren (MA)

“We risk life and limb every single day to help these people, hold their hands as they pass, make them as comfortable as possible...and I know personally eight people on unemployment who are making more money than I am. You can make more money flipping a burger than you can make literally caring for people’s loved ones.” Mike, a CNA in Utah
Drivers of negative comments during COVID

- COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths in nursing homes
- Visitation restrictions fostering perceptions of lack of transparency
- Regulatory and immunity debates elevating concerns about accountability
- Long-standing negative view of “homes” and stigma of aging
- Lack of understanding of the sector and services provided

- Perceptions about quality
  - Reports of poor infection control and resident neglect
  - Insufficient, underpaid, and untrained staff

- Perceptions of profiteering
  - Government resources misused, lined pockets of some nursing home owners
  - Private equity squeezing money out of care

- Vaccine hesitancy among aging services staff
Commentary on broader concerns

System of Funding

"The current system for funding and delivering long-term care services is a national crisis that we have to address." Bob Kramer, cofounder and strategic adviser for the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care and co-founder of Nexus Insights

"[There are] long-standing problems in the structure and financing of nursing homes, which short-term funding, more regulation, and penalties for noncompliance are unlikely to fix." Alice Bonner, Associate Professor at Northeastern University and Advisor to Center for Long-Term Care Quality & Innovation

"Long-term care in the United States has suffered from underfunding and inattention for decades. Failure to address this crisis has enabled widespread coronavirus infection and death in our nation’s nursing homes and assisted living facilities.” Milken Institute

Government Failure During COVID

“Even the most ardent critics of the nursing home industry agree that it was dealt a nearly impossible hand, and in many cases, was left to take the brunt of public anger over the large number of deaths at nursing facilities. But that doesn’t absolve the industry from the poor decision-making that made a bad situation much worse.“ AARP

“Americans have sacrificed so much since March, but [the federal government] hasn’t stepped up to meet that sacrifice.” U.S. PIRG

Community Spread

“If you’re in an environment where there are a lot of people in the community who have COVID, the patients in the building are more likely to have COVID.” Vincent Mor, professor of Health Services, Policy & Practice, Brown University School of Public Health

Vaccine Hesitancy

“But for all that progress, we’re alarmed that just 55% of nursing home workers nationwide—whose job duties include bathing, dressing and feeding residents, the kind of close contact that makes it easier to catch COVID—have been vaccinated.” Chicago Sun Times editorial
Despite differences, key stakeholders are committed to greater support for older adults and their providers. Most stakeholders:

- Support more federal resources to cover care costs
  - Support increase in Medicare and Medicaid
  - Support adjusting Medicaid reimbursement rates to cover actual costs
  - Agree care financing system was broken pre-COVID

- Agree on expanding staff and attracting workers
Perspective of influential policy experts
It's not a true public “system,” experts agree

Older adults face a patchwork of services in which providers work hard to comply—and struggle to even survive

Policymakers are unresponsive

Regulations are complicated, conflicting

Patchwork approach drives systems-level inefficiency

Government funding is inadequate

Policy foundation is not person-centered
Lack of system hinders consumers

The existing patchwork of services and providers makes it difficult for those needing services to identify where to even start to access the services they need.
Aging services approach is based on false assumptions

In actuality:

- People are living longer and aging is a long process
- There are no long-term budget commitments
- We have an aversion to aging…and death
- Consumers and policymakers are in react mode

“It's the ‘wild, wild west’ out there. People are desperate.”

-- Participant, in-depth interview with policy experts
Providers are generally well viewed

- **Nonprofit and religious institutions** viewed more positively (may have more challenges in this regulatory environment)
- Recognition that **no one was prepared for COVID**
- Need **more HCBS programs**; less congregate care
- **Better payment for care workers** is key to revamping aging services
- “**Bad apple**” provider stories receive disproportionate spotlight
There is a perceived absence of advocates for older adults and caregivers

“I think that the political force for change really is caregivers, both paid and unpaid caregivers.”

-- Participant, in-depth interview with policy experts
There is an advocacy role for providers

- Providers need to be **vocal advocates** to ensure government delivers needed resources for older adults
- Post-COVID can be an opportunity for providers to **shape public perceptions**—of them and the sector
- LeadingAge can provide leadership in helping providers **redefine themselves and the sector**
Perspective of academics
Public misunderstanding and lack of knowledge

- Nursing homes dominate the thinking of the general public when talking about aging services
- Little understanding of the full range of aging services options
- Significant avoidance of learning about or planning for how to grow older on one’s own terms. The “ick factor.”

“I’m still using my power tools. Why would I care about long-term care?”

-- 85-year-old Ohioan, shared during in-depth interview with academics
Major shifts in financial models in the sector

- Growth in for-profit providers changing nature of the industry
- Academics say for-profit providers skew services to those who can pay

“And these people going into this business, they don’t know crap about what they’re doing. For them it’s sort of a business investment.”

-- Participant, in-depth interview with academics
Nonprofit vs. for-profit

- General public doesn't know the difference between for-profits and nonprofits, though families of consumers likely have a better sense
- Many hospitals are nonprofit, increasing their favorable views
- Some decisions about care venues made under pressure, other factors dominate: e.g., convenience, location

"As nonprofits, most of us are running pretty lean and mean. It reminds me of watching The Ed Sullivan Show with the guy keeping the 19 plates up in the air. I've got 19 plates in here and something's gonna fall at some point, and we are being hit from so many different directions now."

-- Participant, in-depth interview with provider
Negative perceptions of nursing homes

“People can avoid nursing homes if they’re wealthy enough.”
-- Participant, in-depth interview with academics

Nursing homes are most transparent, but least trusted

Negative perceptions of accountability and transparency diminish trust, especially of nursing homes

“Bad apple” stories negatively affect other providers
Support for staff is high

- Supporting the workforce is central to improving perception of aging services providers. Must ensure professional caregivers’ economic and emotional needs are addressed.

- Telling the story of staff-resident bonds is powerful.

- The public recognizes there is not enough staff.

“The most appealing or compelling aspect of nursing homes, in some ways, is the workforce.”

-- Participant, in-depth interview with academics
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