

Medicaid HCBS and PACE Weekly: Recap of Leading Age Updates

November 18, 2022

LeadingAge Coronavirus Calls. “I love when Dr. Monica Gandhi appears on your LeadingAge calls!” We hear this whenever Monica joins us, which she will be doing on Monday, November 21 at 3:30 PM ET. **Monica Gandhi MD, MPH**, Professor of Medicine and Associate Division Chief of the HIV, Infectious Diseases, and Global Medicine at UCSF/ San Francisco General Hospital will talk about what to expect in the fall and will unpack the idea of the “Tripledemic” of Flu, COVID and RSV. She’ll talk about her sense that we were “lucky” with the Omicron variants and give us a sightline to endemicity...and of course, answer your questions. **No Call on Wednesday November 23.** **On Monday November 28, Dr. Ali H. Mokdad**, Professor of Health Metrics Sciences at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) and Chief Strategy Officer for Population Health at the University of Washington will join us to share new projections for COVID cases going into the fall and winter. 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.

Action Alert: Urge Your Senators and Representatives to Enact Key Aging Services Priorities Before Congress Adjourns. On November 15, LeadingAge issued an action alert urging Congress not to adjourn its session without enacting key services and supports for older adults. “In the remaining weeks of 2022, Congress must not leave key supports and services for older adults unfinished. Severe shortages in the aging services workforce and affordable senior housing, coupled with inefficient and burdensome Medicare Advantage (MA) prior authorization processes that often result in inappropriate care denials, mean that older adults do not have access to needed services and supports. Congress can and must take action to address these crises before it adjourns,” the alert says. [Read and take action on this alert here](#)

LeadingAge Comments on CMS Proposal to Streamline Medicaid Enrollment and Renewal Processes. LeadingAge submitted comments on November 7 in response to a proposed rule from CMS that aims to streamline the processes through which eligible individuals enroll and retain eligibility in Medicaid. While these regulations apply specifically to States, the ways in which enrollment and eligibility processes work affects both beneficiaries and providers who offer services and supports to those individuals. An article about the CMS proposal, with a link to our comment letter, is posted [here](#).

PACE Audit Protocols. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced on Thursday Nov 10th that the final audit protocol for the Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB 0938-1327) and posted to the CMS website. The protocol and supporting data collection instruments (CMS-10630) will be used for PACE audits beginning in 2023 and are available for download [here](#). The Medicare Parts C and D Oversight and Enforcement Group (MOEG) highly encourages organizations to review this protocol, including the data and documentation requests, in preparation for any upcoming audits. CMS’s PACE audits will focus on the criteria listed in the protocols, but CMS may review factors not specifically addressed in the protocol when we discover other related requirements are not being met. All PACE Organizations will be

expected to fully comply with the audit protocol and the associated data collection efforts. In addition, these protocols are not a substitute for a review of the applicable statutes or regulations. of nursing (RNs, NPs, and APRNs).

House Releases Report Laying Out Work on Hunger, Nutrition. House Rules Chairman Jim McGovern (D-MA) capped an effort to draw attention to hunger in the current Congress with a committee vote to send to the full House a [report](#) of testimony and documents that McGovern said offers solutions to hunger and ways to improve the nation's health. The report comes nearly two months after the Biden administration held the second White House hunger conference since 1969. Representative McGovern, with allies in the House and Senate, was instrumental in securing appropriations for the White House conference, held on September 28th. The report looks at hunger on college campuses, challenges for veterans, creative and effective approaches by state and local governments on hunger, food as medicine and medical school curricula, and changes that officials in U.S. territories say are needed to current programs to function effectively.

"Tripledemic" Toolkit. Five major medical societies have teamed up to create a toolkit for clinicians addressing public health concerns related to the "tripledeemic" of COVID-19, flu, and RSV anticipated this winter. The toolkit from the Society for Post-Acute and Long-term Care Medicine (AMDA), American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, American Association of Nurse Practitioners, American Society of Physician Associates, and Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association will help increase awareness of the importance, effectiveness, and accessibility of therapeutics and vaccination in post-acute and long-term care settings. The toolkit includes information on a range of COVID, flu, and MSV myths and facts, sample handouts for residents, family members, staff and others, and many more checklists, fact sheets, and handouts. There is a one hour [recording](#) available from AMDA's Grand Rounds webinar. In December, LeadingAge will feature an interview about the Toolkit on a Coronavirus Update Call. Check out the toolkit [here](#).

New Employee Retention Credit Explainer. LeadingAge has put together a [one-pager](#) explaining the Employee Retention Credit in consultation, with Attorney Chris Moran from the Venable law firm. This complements the [FAQs](#) and [ERC webinar recording](#) that were previously available. The one-page explainer can help members assess whether the tax credit may be an option for their organization. While the tax credit expired after 2021, eligible members can still take advantage of the credit by filing an amended payroll tax return by April 15, 2024 for the 2020 tax year and April 18, 2025 for the 2021 tax year.

White House Requests \$9.25 Billion COVID Funding. In a November 15 briefing with the media, the White House shared it has asked Congress to approve \$9.25 billion in emergency COVID funding during the lame duck session to help prepare for a possible winter surge in cases. Of the \$9.25 billion, \$2.5 billion would go to vaccine access and replenishing the Strategic National Stockpile, \$5 billion would go to further vaccine development, \$750 million for long COVID research, and \$1 billion to international aid combatting COVID.

PHE Will Continue Past January. HHS has promised that they will give states 60 days notice before ending the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE). That 60 day marker to end the PHE in January passed over the weekend; so the PHE will continue past January. It is currently slated to end on January 11. The lack of action this weekend means it will be extended beyond that point but we do not know for how long. HHS has previously done 90 day extensions which would bring us to April. HHS is not required

to do 90 days extensions but given their promise regarding 60 day notice to states, the January extension will be for at least 60 days.

UPDATES FROM HHS:

1. **Using Machine Learning to Identify People With Long COVID:** NIH published [a news story on how machine learning could lead to identify people with Long COVID](#). Researchers supported by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute are developing models that can potentially find people who have Long COVID based on their medical records. Researchers started by examining the records of patients at three of the 59 sites that N3C gathered data from — about 100,000 people who had COVID-19. Nearly 600 of those patients had visited a Long COVID clinic. By comparing these patients with patients who had COVID-19 but did not go to a Long COVID clinic, the researchers built machine learning models that could identify the differences between the groups of patients, such as differences in the medications they were taking, how often they saw other doctors, and other conditions the patients had been diagnosed with. The researchers then tested the models on health records from a fourth N3C site. In total, the researchers created three models — one for identifying potential Long COVID patients across the whole dataset and two that focused more specifically on people who had or had not been hospitalized for COVID-19. After testing, the researchers found that each model was highly effective at identifying people who likely had Long COVID. With more refinement, models like these could help researchers determine whether a person with a positive COVID-19 test may be likely to develop Long COVID. Once they can identify those people, researchers can determine what they have in common and what differentiates them from those who do not have Long COVID, paving the way for better and faster treatment of patients with Long COVID.
2. **Inflammation Pattern in the Brain May Cause Many Long COVID Symptoms:** NIH published [a news story on how inflammation pattern in the brain may cause many Long COVID symptoms](#). In a study supported by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, researchers looked at the effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection in animal models to understand potential causes of Long COVID. Their findings suggest that in addition to causing long-lasting organ damage, SARS-CoV-2 can set off a pattern of brain inflammation that may be linked to Long COVID symptoms. Researchers at New York University Grossman School of Medicine and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai used hamsters as models for SARS-CoV-2 infection, since their infection duration and symptoms are similar to those of humans. The researchers compared these models to hamster models of influenza infection, which produces a similar antiviral response. On average, the animal models recovered from their SARS-CoV-2 infections in two weeks — the same as humans — and developed similar symptoms. This told the researchers that the models were an appropriate comparison to the human immune response. When compared to the influenza models, models that recovered from SARS-CoV-2 infection had greater levels of lung and kidney damage, and the damage healed more slowly. This study provides more evidence for the theory that some Long COVID symptoms, such as mood changes, dizziness, and brain fog, may be caused by brain inflammation triggered by — but not directly fighting — SARS-CoV-2. Future research can use

the same kind of model to look at potential treatments for that inflammation, as well as treatments for the longer-lasting damage done to other organs.

3. **Poor Immune Response After Treatment Likely Not Responsible for “COVID Rebound”:** NIH published [a news story on how poor immune response after treatment is not likely responsible for “COVID Rebound.”](#) People who get COVID-19 can be treated with a five-day course of an antiviral drug called Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir and ritonavir), which drastically reduces a person’s chance of being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19. But about 5% of people who take the medicine get symptoms or test positive a week or so later in what some call “COVID rebound.” There is concern that the five-day treatment course is not long enough to wipe out the virus and that people experiencing a rebound may have an inadequate immune response to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. In a small study supported by the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, researchers found that Paxlovid did not hinder the immune response. In fact, people who experienced COVID rebound seemed to have more active immunity, suggesting the symptoms could be partly due to an overactive immune system sweeping up the last bits of the virus. Whether they took Paxlovid or not, the people who experienced COVID rebound made antibodies against COVID-19 equally fast. This suggests that Paxlovid was not stifling the immune response of those who took it, allowing researchers to rule out a poor immune response allowing the virus to linger and cause COVID rebound. This research suggests that Paxlovid is working as expected, even though symptoms may come back or people may test positive for the virus afterward. Additionally, small studies like this help researchers figure out what’s going on in the body or in the cells, providing leads for other studies.
4. **HHS Toolkits on Updated COVID-19 Vaccines.** In this toolkit created by the Department of Health and Human Services, you can find answers to frequently asked questions, talking points, tips, and other science-based information about COVID-19. The toolkit also includes information on COVID-19 vaccines to use in conversations and to share in-person and through direct mailings, newsletters, emails, and social media accounts. You can read the toolkit in full, and navigate to the rest of the website, which details the COVID-19 Public Education Campaign [here](#).

Save the Date: Strengthen Aging Services Leadership on Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday provides us an opportunity to contribute to causes that matter. One LeadingAge cause that is near and dear to us is developing strong and passionate leaders in our field. [Donate to the Larry Minnix Leadership Development Fund](#) on Giving Tuesday—November 29, 2022.