

## Workforce Policy Weekly

February 10, 2023



**LeadingAge Policy Update Calls, covering all the updates aging services providers need on what goes on in Washington and what it means for you and the people you serve, care for, and house, including but not limited to Coronavirus. Long COVID patient – study thyself!** On **Monday, February 13**, Lisa McCorkell will join us to talk about the Patient-Led Research Collaborative, a group of Long COVID patients who are also researchers. Their mission is to facilitate patient-led and patient-involved research into Long Covid and associated conditions while following rigorous research methodology and to advocate for policies that enable patients, particularly the most marginalized, to access care and live with dignity. The pandemic has exhausted workers. Join us on **Wednesday, February 15** to hear from Michele Holleran, Founder and CEO of Holleran Consulting. Michele will talk about best practices to improve supervisor well-being. 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.

**LeadingAge Asks Members to Urge Congress to Cosponsor Bills in Support Our Caregivers and Workforce.** Please take this opportunity to let your representatives on Capitol Hill know you want them to cosponsor "The Better Care Better Jobs Act, S. 100/H.R. 547." This bill contains vital provisions that would enhance funding for Medicaid home and community-based services, that would ultimately lead to better pay and benefits for caregivers, expand eligibility and access to community-based services, enhance quality of life for families, and help create middle-class jobs. Use LeadingAge's Action Alert template to send messages to your members of Congress to support the reintroduction of "The Better Care Better Jobs Act (BCBJA), S. 100/H.R. 547."

**SOTU Through an Aging Services and Workforce Policy Agenda Lens.** In the President's State of the Union (SOTU) speech on February 7, he made references to several issues and goals related to aging services and workforce policy agenda lens. You can access the address, as prepared here. Some excerpts and highlights include:

- "Covid no longer controls our lives." Six words everyone is ready to hear, especially those who provide or use aging services.
- Guaranteeing all workers, a living wage. LeadingAge has long advocated this position, coupled with reimbursement rates to pay such wages.
- "And let's also come together on immigration and make it a bipartisan issue like it was before..... Since we launched our new border plan last month, unlawful migration from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela has come down 97%. But America's border problems won't be fixed until Congress acts. If you won't pass my comprehensive immigration reform, at least pass my plan to provide the equipment and officers to secure the border. And a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, those on temporary status, farm workers, and essential workers." LeadingAge continues to advocate for and support legislation that would that encourage more people to join our field – including immigrants, an support the recruitment of foreign nurses and skilled professional staff through employment visas that would target direct care workers in LTSS, and create a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers.

- “Helping older individuals stay in their homes. Supporting enactment of expansions like those proposed in Better Care Better Jobs bills that have been introduced in both chambers will move us closer to this end. “(See LeadingAge Action Alert, below.)
- “We’re protecting seniors’ lives and life savings by cracking down on nursing homes that commit fraud, endanger patient safety, or prescribe drugs they don’t need.” This was the only reference to nursing homes (much shorter than last year). It’s critical to note that LeadingAge’s message may have gotten through because this statement does not bucket all nursing homes together. He referred only to those providers who engage in these illegal or unethical behaviors. Still, LeadingAge will be meeting with the Nursing Home Quality Initiative team to continue driving home the point that most providers do not fit this description and deserve accolades for their mission focused work.
- Don’t cut Social Security and Medicare, lifelines for millions of older people. The President said, “stand up for seniors!” Medicare, of course, is also a lifeline for many providers of post-acute care.

LeadingAge will continue to advocate for establishing an office on aging in the White House to keep the focus on these goals and action plans.

**Legislation to Expand Telehealth Benefits for American Workers Introduced.** On February 2, Reps. Suzan Delbene (D-WA), Tim Walberg (R-MI), Angie Craig (D-MN), Ron Estes (R-KS), Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) and Rick Allen (R-GA), introduced bipartisan legislation to expand access to employer-sponsored telehealth benefits. The “Telehealth Benefit Expansion for Workers Act” would allow employers to offer workers stand-alone telehealth benefits, like dental and vision plans, in addition to traditional health care plans. The bill would enable all workers, including part-time and seasonal workers to access telehealth benefits, and ensure patients can connect with their health care providers from their own homes. Additionally, the bill sponsors [state](#) the legislation will help to provide employers with more certainty and ensure they will have access to expanded long-term access to telehealth benefits that would not be tied to the COVID-19 public health emergency, as currently is the scenario for several of the Medicare telehealth services. During the last Congress this legislation was supported on a bipartisan basis. The text of the Telehealth Benefit Expansion for Workers Act is available [here](#).

**CDC adds Covid-19 Vaccines to its Official Immunization Schedule, Formalizes Guidance for Health Care Professions** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention added Covid-19 vaccinations for children, adolescents, and adults to its immunization schedule. These updates reflect current agency recommendations. Adding them formalizes that guidance for health care providers and schools. The CDC’s vaccination schedule, released February 9, does not mandate vaccines. The FDA’s vaccine advisory committee recently voted unanimously to recommend that all primary vaccination series switch to the updated bivalent shot, but the agency has yet to adopt these recommendations. The committee also discussed a possible path forward to include yearly Covid-19 booster vaccinations, similar to the annual flu shot, but didn’t formalize any action. [More information on adult immunization schedule by age here.](#)

**CMS Resources on Strengthening the Direct Care Workforce.** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has released an online training course and a series of resources that offer strategies and information on [self-direction](#) of home and community-based services, strengthening the direct service workforce (DSW) in rural areas, and emerging strategies for states. Direct care workers, also referred to

as direct service workers, provide essential supports to older adults and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and behavioral health needs.

**[Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Direct Service Workers to Provide Self-directed Home and Community-Based Services \(HCBS\)](#)**: Online training that provides information to people who self-direct or wish to self-direct their HCBS and others interested in finding, hiring, and retaining workers.

**[Strengthening the Direct Service Workforce in Rural Areas](#)**: Report that summarizes the challenges of ensuring an adequate workforce in rural areas and strategies that state Medicaid and partner agencies and rural stakeholders can use to deliver high-quality HCBS.

**[The Self-direction Briefing Paper Series](#)**: Resources designed for policymakers and stakeholders to inform conversation and policy on HCBS self-direction.

**[Emerging Strategies for States](#)**: DSW Learning Collaborative summary of themes, challenges, and strategies from state Medicaid and partner agencies participating in CMS' 2021 DSW State Medicaid Learning Collaborative.

**PACE Model Isn't Immune from Workforce Woes, Study Illustrates**. Recent reporting from [Altarum](#) on their PACE Program survey spanning the months of May to September 2022 show significant challenges recruiting, hiring, and retaining all types of workers. Direct care staff in participant homes was cited as the most challenging position by PACE directors. The article also touts PACE program employees reporting higher job satisfaction and respect in their roles, when compared with similar positions with other types of providers.

**LeadingAge Resources Available for National Caregivers Day**. National Caregivers Day, Friday, February 17, is a chance to recognize the compassionate, dedicated caregiving professionals in your community. LeadingAge released to members a variety of tools to acknowledge these indispensable women and men and mobilize people to address the severe shortage of professional caregivers. The [National Caregivers Day Tools for LeadingAge Members](#) page has all the ready-to-go resources.

**LeadingAge Leaders of Color Advocacy Webinar Series - Session Two: Let's Talk About State Advocacy**. LeadingAge will host a three-part webinar series designed to help leaders of color in the field of aging services become involved in advocacy at the state and federal levels. The webinars will offer a practical guide to the advocacy process as seen through the eyes of seasoned advocates. Join us, Tuesday, February 14, from 2 – 3:15 pm ET, for a webinar to gain a new appreciation for the importance of sharing your unique perspectives with government policymakers. It will help you understand how state advocacy works, how it impacts providers of aging services, and how people at all levels of an aging services organization can become engaged in advocacy. Leaders of color will reflect on their advocacy journeys and will describe how they navigated the advocacy process; the types of advocacy work they pursued; and the practical benefits they, their team members, and residents/clients experienced. LeadingAge state executives will share examples of their advocacy work, explore the importance of building relationships with state legislators and Governor's office staff, and discuss their engagement with U.S. state senators and congressmen about issues related to their communities. Register for the February 14 webinar [here](#).