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December 12th, 2023

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Headlines

[Forced to work in a vacuum, MedPAC recommends another Medicare cut](#)

McKnight's Long Term Care News

December 11, 2023

A Congressional advisory group appears ready to recommend a 3% Medicare pay cut for nursing homes in 2025. In what has become an annual tradition, members of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission voiced ongoing concerns Friday about the use of Medicare Fee for Service reimbursement to effectively subsidize Medicaid rates and Medicare Advantage payments. With official data indicating that patients still have plenty of access to care, panel staff recommended MedPAC tell Congress that it should pursue a cut to Chair Michael Chernew, PhD, a healthcare policy professor at Harvard, said the 3% cut could be steeper given the reported margins. But the commission—tasked only with considering Medicare policy—remains cognizant of the pressures faced by providers accepting Medicaid and being increasingly low balled by managed care plans.

Hospice Provider News

[Children in hospice care gifted Christmas presents in Virginia Beach](#)

WVEC-TV (Norfolk, VA)

December 10, 2023

Virginia Beach, VA—It's the season of giving and Edmarc and Dominion Energy are teaming up to give back to families who need it most. Sunday morning, Santa Claus and a team of helpers from Dominion Energy and Edmarc delivered Christmas gifts to families with children facing life-threatening, terminal illnesses. Edmarc, a nonprofit that helps children in hospice care, organized the effort. The organization's assistant director, Dorothy Jenson, said it's about taking the stress off families who need a reason to smile. "The holidays are especially hard for some families... This puts everybody into the spirit," she said. "We treat the whole family, not just the child who's sick." She said her team wanted to lift spirits and make sure families with sick children can make the most of the holidays.

Clinical News

[Experts offer suggestions for dealing with holiday anxiety and depression](#)

Macomb (MI) Daily

December 10, 2023

At this time of year, everywhere around there are full of holiday images of family gatherings, brightly lit trees, lavish gifts and tables laden with rich foods, beverages and desserts. For those whose depression and anxiety is triggered by the holiday season and those who have lost a loved one, a treasured pet, or even a job and are grieving, the holidays can be tough to navigate. "One of the things we do say is to know your own limitations," said Karen Monts, practice manager of Counseling Services at Hospice of Michigan. "Don't feel pressured to do things a certain way or allow images on television to get into your mind so that you feel like everyone is having a wonderful holiday except you, because we know that is not the case." Monts says trying to plan ahead for the holiday can help to alleviate stress and depression. "You know this is going to be a different holiday without that loved one, so try and figure out what works for you," Monts said. ... Monts

advises people who are experiencing grief, anxiety and depression at the holidays to use the “AIM” method to sort out their emotions: access what you are feeling; identify what you are experiencing; and manage what you do in response to those feelings.



HOSPICE ANALYTICS

[Memorial tree returns to River Park Square](#)

KREM-TV (Spokane, WA)

December 10, 2023

Spokane, WA—A holiday tradition is back at River Park Square to give community members a chance to honor departed loved ones. Hospice of Spokane’s memorial tree returned to the shopping center’s third floor Saturday. It’s filled with handwritten messages of remembrance on decorated dove ornaments. Shoppers can stop and fill out and decorate a dove of their own to add to the tree. “It’s a great way for people to remember their loved ones who’ve died, whether recently or a long time ago. It can be part of the grieving process,” said volunteer Beth Priest.

Regulatory News

[In letter to CMS, lawmakers call for more MA transparency](#)

McKnight’s Home Care Daily

December 11, 2023

Four senators demanded the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services make more data surrounding prior authorizations in Medicare Advantage publicly available. “In the last few years, federal watchdogs have released numerous reports examining concerning trends in MA,” Sens. Bill Cassidy, MD (R-LA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), the letter’s signees, said in a statement. “Without publicly available plan-level data ... policymakers and regulators are unable to adequately oversee the program and legislate potential reforms.” The senators specifically requested CMS gather and publish data regarding prior authorization requests, denials and appeals, justifications for denials and the timeliness of prior authorization decisions.

Public Policy News

[Disability activists also oppose aid in dying](#)

By Susie Mosher

Daily Hampshire Gazette (Northampton, MA)

December 9, 2023

... For the aged or those with degenerative or chronic diseases, many people in the final stages of life are suddenly, newly disabled without having lived a life managing a disability. Inadequate resources, the lack of emotional support, the physical challenges, the stresses on relatives and caregivers—all are overwhelming. ... We know that, despite good intentions, the state of Massachusetts already has many agencies, policies and programs that are underfunded, not carefully monitored, poorly managed, and understaffed. People with mental illnesses, disabilities, without power, and without a voice are not well served. People with disabilities know how the health care system and our government fails them as they struggle daily to advocate for themselves. Legislators and news outlets would do well to listen to people who face existential challenges day to day. The disability community is advocating for palliative services, not lethal doses. They have experienced the terrifying slippery slope of “quality of life” assessments by professionals. Their testimony advocates for education and support for caregivers, not assisted suicide.



M&A News

[Cigna Calls Off Humana Pursuit, Plans Big Stock Buyback](#)

Wall Street Journal

December 10, 2023

Cigna Group abandoned its pursuit of a tie-up with Humana after shareholders balked at a deal that would have created a roughly \$140 billion giant in the health-insurance industry. The companies couldn't come to agreement on price and other financial terms, according to people familiar with the matter. In the near term, Cigna is turning its focus toward smaller, so-called bolt-on, acquisitions.

Post-Acute Care News

[CT hospitals need nurse-to-patient ratios. Legislators should mandate them](#)

By Kristin Henry, RN

CT Mirror

December 9, 2023

As a registered nurse in Connecticut—one who graduated in 2019 shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic made its boisterous presence—I have seen firsthand the detrimental effects that inadequate staffing and unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios can have on the health

of your loved ones. ... Appropriate nursing staff not only would achieve clinical and economic improvements in patient care, it would decrease nurse fatigue and burnout. ... Unsafe nurse-to-patient ratios have been statistically shown to increase patient mortality. ... Gov. Ned Lamont signed a bill into law effective October 1 of this year. Under Public Act 23-204, CT hospitals must create a dedicated staffing committee to develop nurse staffing plans. Hospitals that fail to comply can face penalties. This bill is a small step in a very long staircase. Nowhere in this bill does it mention mandating specific staffing ratios. Until nurses and patients are protected from unsafe situations by the state, the battle is not over.

Maine nursing homes lead in meeting proposed staffing standards

Maine Monitor

December 10, 2023

Maine nursing homes are closer to meeting the Biden administration's proposed minimum staffing standards than their counterparts in most other states, but recent payroll data show that still fewer than one in 10 are meeting these proposed standards every day. And while some long-term care advocates said the national standards should go further, nursing home industry leaders said it would be difficult for a rural state like Maine to find the workers to meet the required minimums, which could lead to more closures. ... During the second quarter of 2023—from April to June—Maine nursing homes met the proposed minimum care hours from both registered nurses and nurse aides an average of 59 out of 91 days in the quarter, according to analysis from *The Maine Monitor*, *USA TODAY* and *Big Local News at Stanford University*, the latest federal staffing data. ... However, only 8% of Maine nursing homes met both standards on all 91 days of the quarter.

Home care largely unaffordable, especially for middle-class seniors, Harvard research shows

McKnight's Home Care Daily

December 11, 2023

The majority of people in need of long-term care in the home are unable to afford it, according to a new Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies report. The study, sponsored by the National Investment Center and released on Nov. 30, used census data to investigate seniors' ability to keep up with the rising costs of home care. According to the data, only 14% of single person-households aged 75 years and older can afford daily home health visits. Meanwhile, alternatives like assisted living, are also largely out of reach to a majority of average-income seniors. "The median cost of a home health aide in the U.S. is \$27 an hour, and services typically must be purchased in four-hour blocks—resulting in a minimum cost of over \$100 per day," the researchers explained in the study.

Aging population requires 'bold leadership' to protect human dignity—LeadingAge to House Speaker

McKnight's Senior Living

December 11, 2023

The growing population of older adults requires “bold leadership” to ensure aging with dignity, as well as access to care and support, according to an open letter from LeadingAge to Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA). The changing demographics and need to support older adults where they live and receive services presents a unique opportunity for Johnson to demonstrate leadership and commitment to “protecting human dignity,” according to the letter from LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan. ... “The US healthcare system is navigating a new and unfamiliar landscape in the wake of the COVID-19 public health emergency,” Sloan wrote. “Three years of sustained stress and increasing workloads have caused a dramatic shift in staffing patterns and an alarming rise in burnout across health professions.”

General News

[Unemployment rate dips to 3.7 percent in November](#)

McKnight's Senior Living

December 11, 2023

The national unemployment rate declined from 3.9% in October to 3.7% in November, according to the monthly unemployment report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. ... Additionally, the economy added 199,000 new jobs in November, with gains in healthcare, government and manufacturing. Healthcare added 77,000 jobs, which the BLS noted is above the average monthly gain of 54,000 over the prior 12 months. Nursing and residential care facilities added 17,000 jobs, ambulatory healthcare services gained 36,000 jobs and hospitals gained 24,000 jobs last month.

[Nurses at University Medical Center vote to unionize, a Louisiana first](#)

Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA)

December 10, 2023

LCMC Health's University Medical Center nurses voted to join National Nurses United, the largest U.S. union for registered nurses, after a three-day vote that ended Saturday night. The union will be Louisiana's first among health care workers. It is also one of the state's largest, with 598 eligible members. More than 90% of eligible nurses voted in the election. Of those who voted, 82% voted in favor of the union, according to National Nurses United. ... Officials at UMC acknowledged the union and said they would “continue to work with the National Labor Relations Board and operate consistently with the processes established by the National Labor Relations Act.” ... Next, the union will be certified by the National Labor Relations Board. Negotiations and bargaining on a contract come after that. ... The union includes registered nurses who are full-time, part-time and per diem, along with clinic nurses and nurse practitioners.

Today's Encouragement

"Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do." Steve Jobs

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