



McKnight's
Senior Living



Pre-COVID feel for the labor market

BY KATHLEEN STEELE GAIVIN

The private sector added 64,000 jobs in December, and annual pay was up 5.4% year over year, according to an ADP National Employment Report released at press time.

The job count is up from the previous report, which showed 103,000 jobs added in November.

"We're returning to a labor market that's very much aligned with pre-pandemic hiring," ADP Chief Economist Nela Richardson said in a press release issued in conjunction with the monthly report. "While wages didn't drive the recent bout of inflation, now that pay growth has retreated, any risk of a wage-price spiral has all but disappeared."

The report analyzes the payroll transactions of more than 25 million US workers. The data, released by the ADP Research Institute in collaboration with the Stanford

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Changes related to technology adoption, workforce challenges and choice are expected to continue, one expert says.

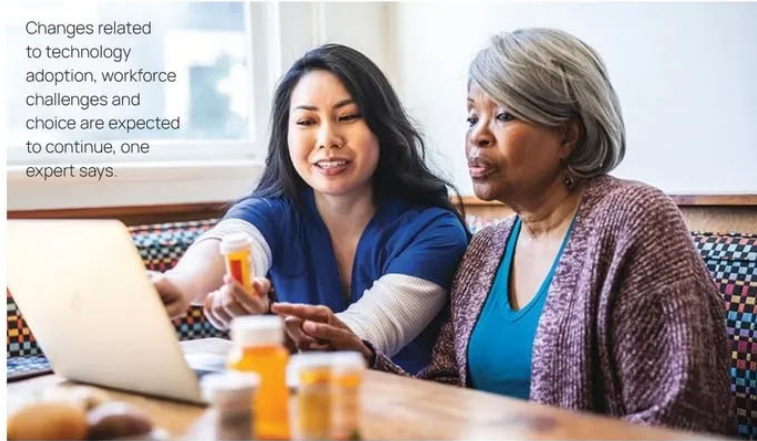


Photo: MoMo Productions / Getty Images

The pace of change is about to quicken

BY KIMBERLY BONVISSUTO

The senior housing and care industry has experienced an accelerated pace of change over the past decade – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic – in areas including technology adoption, workforce challenges and choice, and that pace will continue, according to one industry expert.

Lisa McCracken, the new head of research and analytics for the National

Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care, talked during a recent LeadingAge policy update call about what she is seeing in her crystal ball as the industry enters the new year.

"The pandemic was an accelerant across many different levels. A lot of things unfolded much quicker," she said.

The industry, McCracken said, is in the earlier stages regarding much technology,

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A few minutes with...
Sheryl Zimmerman, MSW, PhD,
answers questions about the new
CEAL@UNC, where she is
executive director.
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Accelerated pace of change will continue in field, McCracken says

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especially as relates to adoption. That reality, she added, brings questions about how to pay for it, who will pay for it and what providers can cover from an investment standpoint if technology helps improve outcomes and efficiencies.

Artificial intelligence also presents opportunities in terms of predicting when a resident's health might start to decline or when a resident might be prone to falling, and to identify signs of employees who may be more likely to leave their jobs, McCracken said.

"There is a lot of predictive data out there," she said. Generative AI, McCracken added, processes data in different ways and helps with the human touch aspect of care and service provision by allowing staff members "to do the more important things."

"I'm a big fan of a lot of the workforce tech that helps from an efficiency standpoint to reallocate staff time," she said.

NIC, she added, is working with NORC at the University of Chicago to quantify the

value that senior living brings to individuals from the standpoint of quality of life, longevity and health outcomes — and how that value can translate to the reimbursement side for some operators. Organizations, McCracken added, must adopt a business intelligence and analytics mindset to better quantify the sector's story.

"The pandemic was an accelerant across many different levels."

"How can you prove your own worth?" she asked. "We know it, we feel it, we see it — but we live in a world that demands the evidence. We need to do better at that."

The integration of wellness into offerings, as well as risk partnerships with payers, are other innovative happenings that McCracken said she is see-

ing, "recognizing we can't do this alone, and maybe we don't need to be the end all, be all, but a convener to make bold moves."

Partnerships, she added, are helping NIC propel some initiatives forward. A partnership with the Milken Institute, for instance, recently yielded a report regarding middle market solutions for senior housing and care.

This report follows the November announcement of a \$3 million grant that NIC provided to the institute's Center for the Future of Aging to "develop bold new models" for senior housing and care. As part of that effort, Nexus Insights, a think tank founded almost four years ago by NIC founder Bob Kramer, is merging with the new Aging Innovation Collaborative within the center.

"We recognize that NIC has a powerful voice within the senior housing and care space, but others are looking at the population of older adults and saying what we need to know, how to partner, how to think innovatively," McCracken said. ■



Photo: Jose Luis Pelaez Inc/Getty Images

Older workers make up an increasing part of the workforce.

Older workers to the rescue?

BY ADAM HEALY

The share of people aged 65 or more years who are employed has almost doubled in the past 35 years, according to a new report by the Pew Research Center.

Pew reached the finding using data from the Census Bureau Current Population Survey and the Federal Reserve 2022 Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking. It found that almost 20% of Americans aged 65 or more years were in the workforce in 2023, and those employees are working more hours and earning more money than ever.

More than 60% of those older workers are working full time; in 1987, the percentage was less than half. They also are more likely to be receiving employee benefits such as health insurance or pension plans. ■

Labor market aligning with pre-pandemic one

Continued from page 1

Digital Economy Lab, showed a service sector gain of 155,000 jobs overall, with education / health adding 42,000 jobs (compared with 44,000 added the previous month). The biggest gains were seen in the leisure/hospitality sector, which added 59,000 jobs in December.

By US region, private employers in the West had the biggest job gains last month, at 109,000, followed by the Northeast, with 94,000 additional jobs. The South lost 7,000 jobs, and the

Midwest lost 21,000.

Firms with 500 or more employees gained 40,000 jobs overall, whereas companies with 50 to 499 workers added 53,000 jobs. Businesses with one to 49 employees collectively expanded by 74,000 jobs.

Pay gains slow

"Pay for job-stayers rose 5.4% in December, slowing from 5.6% a month earlier and continuing a deceleration that began in September 2022," the report said.

Firms with one to 19 work-

ers saw the smallest median change in annual pay, at 4.6%. The change was 5.6% for companies with 20 to 49 employees, 5.7% for businesses with 50 to 249 workers, 5.5% for employers with 250 to 499 employees and 5.4% at firms with 500 or more workers.

Unemployment claims drop

Meanwhile, initial filings for unemployment for the week of Dec. 30 decreased by 18,000 from the previous week's revised level. ■

McKnight's Senior Living is published in February, April, June, August, October and December by Haymarket Media, Inc., 275 7th Avenue, 10th Floor, New York, NY, 10001. Tel. (646) 638-6000.

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Investors expect rent increases in the range of 3% to 7%

BY LOIS A. BOWERS

Sixty-six percent of respondents to a newly released survey said they expect rental rate increases of 3% to 7% over the next 12 months for active adult, independent living, assisted living and memory care communities.

Participants in the 13th edition of CBRE's Senior Housing & Care Investor Survey primarily were private or institutional investors, brokers or developers. The survey was conducted in October, and results were released in December.

No respondents said they anticipate rent decreases for any long-term care asset class.

The highest percentage of participants said they expected senior living and care rate increases of 3% to 7% over the next 12 months, with 72% of respondents in this group predicting such increases at continuing care retirement / life plan communities, 63.3% anticipating them at active adult communities, 61.3% expecting them at independent living communities, 56.3%

predicting them at assisted living communities and 53.1% anticipating them at memory care communities. By comparison, 47.8% in this group said they expect such increases at SNFs.

Of those who said they expect rent growth greater than 7%, 28.1% predicted that it will occur in assisted living, 25% anticipated that it will happen in memory care, 19.4% said that it will take place in independent living, 13.3% predicted that it will occur in active adult, and 4% anticipated that it will happen at CCRCs. By comparison, no respondents said that rent growth of this level will take place in skilled nursing.

Of those who said they expect rent growth of 1% to 3% over the next 12 months, 20% said they expect it in active adult, 16.1% said they predict it for independent living, 15.6% said they anticipate it for memory care and 12.5% said they expect it in assisted living. By comparison, 43.5% said they anticipate rate increases of this level for SNFs. ■

LTC Properties tweaks Brookdale holdings

BY LOIS A. BOWERS

Completion of changes to a 35-community Brookdale Senior Living portfolio owned by Westlake Village, CA-based LTC Properties has resulted in 17 communities being released to Brentwood, TN-based Brookdale, eight communities being sold, the operation of five communities being transferred to Oxford Senior Living, and the operation of five other communities being transferred

to Navion Senior Solutions. The real estate investment trust said it expects net proceeds of \$23 million and an anticipated net gain of \$17 million related to the sales.

"Importantly, rent from the previous portfolio has been fully replaced, and we've generated sales proceeds to pay down a portion of our debt," LTC Chairman and CEO Wendy Simpson said, calling the outcome "favorable." ■

You've Got
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ANSWERS



Lynne Moore

President
MDS Research Company, Inc.

Q: How can I ensure that my community is properly positioned for the future?

A: Senior living is in a transition phase. Changes encompass new living arrangements, service delivery systems, designs, health and wellness initiatives, technology tools and more. Although senior living still is going through another year of recovery, the future generally looks favorable. Demographic growth is strong, occupancies are rising and new construction has been limited.

Many owner/operators are taking a fresh look at optimizing resident satisfaction while dealing with increased resident needs in a blurred and overlapping continuum. Some senior living communities are considering adding an active adult product to expand the independent living end of their continuum and attract younger, healthier and more independent baby boomers. Communities without room for expansion are looking at renovating and upgrading their physical facilities or modifying their mix of living arrangements. Many are considering alternative service delivery systems or unbundling or adding services to offer more flexibility and choice. And all are evaluating pricing to assess whether opportunity exists for increases or new revenue sources.

Many operators are going to find themselves in the situation of having to establish a relationship with and serve the next generation of consumers while continuing to serve their existing residents. Having a good handle on market positioning is going to be essential for marketing and communication purposes in the future, especially as new, competitive products start to enter the market again.

Lynne Moore is president of MDS Research Company Inc., a national senior living and healthcare consulting firm based in Fort Worth, TX, that has been serving clients for 48 years. MDS is a two-generation company - she is following in Jim Moore's footsteps. Ms. Moore is responsible for all MDS market research-related projects involving all aspects of senior housing and healthcare. Lynne Moore can be reached at (817) 731-4266 or lynne.moore@m-d-s.com.

Labor Update

» The Department of Labor issued a final rule revising how senior living companies and other employers determine who is an employee versus an independent contractor. It is effective March 11. "The misclassification of employees as independent contractors may deny workers minimum wage, overtime pay and other protections," the DOL said, adding that the rule will provide "a consistent approach for businesses."

Policy Update

» Year-over-year growth in the home health space was 13.5% in October, making it the fastest-growing component of national health spending, according to Altarum's monthly Health Sector Economic Indicators brief, released in January. Nursing home care spending grew by 7.8% for the same period. In September, nursing home care had represented one of the fastest-growing categories of national health spending.

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**Marketing
BRIEFS**

» **A new study is uncovering just how tough it can be** financially to live with dementia. The report, published Dec. 29 in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, found that almost 56% of people with dementia face financial hardships. Those financial challenges are linked with worse reported satisfaction with life and healthcare.

» **Two senior living communities have launched initiatives** to elevate care for residents living with dementia and other cognitive issues. Ascent Living Communities has launched Bridge to Belonging in two of its five Colorado communities to help residents and their families bridge the gap between traditional assisted living resources and memory care. The program will supplement daily needs, provide routines, cognitive stimulation and consistency. Meanwhile, Anthem Memory Care is building on its Pathways of Purpose initiatives. Introduced last year, Pathways of Purpose is a tailored approach to activities that affirms each resident's identity and creates opportunities for connections within their community.

» **In a case study of new residents and their families** across the nation by Bild & Co., 73% of family members and 72% of residents rated their overall move-in experience between eight and 10 on a 10-point scale. But that experience started to slip within the first 90 days after a move, as only 47% of residents and family members said they were happy with the move-in experience and the process. Common negative feedback by families during visits included a lack of communication about paperwork, food, housekeeping and care; food pricing, options or quality not meeting expectations; staff turnover and long sign-in procedures at the front desk; and unkept rooms. One takeaway is that operators need to be proactive in thinking about what will appeal to the next generation of residents.



Photos (L): RgStudio/Getty Images; (R): michaelquirk/Getty Images

Concessions threaten sales process and rate integrity

BY KIMBERLY BONVISSUTO

Incentives are on the rise among senior living operators trying to increase occupancy, but it's more important to focus on rate integrity and showing the value of a community, cautions one industry sales and marketing expert.

The most common discounts communities were offering in the third quarter were reduced or discounted rent, waived or reduced community fees, or veterans/signature club discounts, according to a recent white paper from Bild & Co. on concession trends seen among more than 250 senior living locations across the country.

The average community move-in fee in the first quarter was \$2,403. That climbed to \$3,048 the third quarter — higher than the 2022 average of \$2,551. But of the 43% of communities that waived or reduced the community fee, 26% offered between a 50% and 75% reduction, whereas the other 74% of communities offered to waive 100% of the community fee.

Rent reductions typically lasted for one month but could last up to 12 months in some cases, with the most common reduction being for three months. The rent reductions ranged from \$1,545 to \$4,000 per month.

"The trends we have seen with this case study are that incentives are on the rise," Bild & Co. CEO Jennifer Saxman told *McKnight's Senior Living*, adding that holiday deals are common. "However, we really need to focus



Rent reductions typically lasted for one month but could last up to 12 months in some cases.

on rate integrity. No matter the incentive, if you haven't shown the value of what your community can bring to the life and care of a prospective resident, then we are missing the true essences of what we do."

The Pacific Northwest is normally seen as having high senior living community fees, but Saxman said the report showed that the South Atlantic region and areas that typically are perceived as more affordable are "really pulling away" with higher-than-normal community fees. But she added that the region also is one of the quickest to waive that fee, which compromises rate integrity. ■

Operators leaving money on the table: expert

BY KIMBERLY BONVISSUTO

As senior living residents decline in health and need more services and care, it's more important than ever for providers to be aware of the full-package value of their amenities and services so they are not leaving revenue on the table, according to one sales and marketing expert.

Operators too often focus on room rates, consistently missing the opportunity to charge for the value of the full package they offer, according to Bild & Co. CEO Jennifer Saxman.

Consumers, she said, are more aware of pricing, and companies in the industry do a good job of communicating their pricing, but

they don't focus enough on costs related to their ancillary costs or the entire value of what they offer.

What's missing is the all-inclusive rate for a higher level of care and services, Saxman said.

A Bild survey of more than 250 senior living locations nationwide found that among the most common services and amenities associated with an extra charge were trash services (an average of \$60 to \$80 per month), laundry (\$20 per week), telephone (\$20 per month), garage or storage space (\$35 to \$70 per month), pet fees (a \$500 to \$700 one-time deposit and then \$25 monthly) and additional meals (\$5 to \$8 per meal). ■

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Bits & BYTES

» **It's yet another acronym senior living** and memory care providers should familiarize themselves with: CCT, which stands for computerized cognitive training. The terminology refers to digital exercise options that older adults living with dementia can use to improve cognitive function or slow down decline. Older adults who took on CCT training independently, however, showed equal progress in bolstering their memory, a new study shows.



» **Using artificial intelligence** and cutting back on meetings are two ways to help improve workplace productivity, according to the company behind recent research. Qualtrics conducted the survey for Slack Technologies among full-time workers in the United States, Australia, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Results were released in December.

» **Although virtual reality systems** often are seen as solitary entertainment in a fabricated world, the use of VR systems in senior living appears to motivate people to interact and socialize more vibrantly with elements of the real world, a new study shows. Older adults who used a VR program that involved walking around a cityscape ended up being more active, both physically and socially, even if the VR itself didn't involve social interaction, the study found.

» **When it comes to new innovations** for the bedroom, tech companies aren't dozing on the potential of the senior living and care market. Several dozen companies showcased sleep tech items, including the DeRUCCI Group's new slate of products, including "smart" pillows and mattresses, during the recent CES 2024 conference. Products will be commercially available at some point this year.

Photos (L): Hispanicistic/Getty Images; (R): PUGUN.SJ/Getty Images

Breach could affect 21,000, cost operator at least \$1M

BY KIMBERLY BONVISSUTO

A data breach reportedly exposing the personal information of 21,000 employees and residents could cost a senior living operator \$1 million in a proposed settlement approved by a federal judge.

In a settlement that has received preliminary approval from a federal court, Fort Washington, PA-based Acts Retirement-Life Communities would pay \$1 million to settle allegations that it failed to protect personal information of 20,754 individuals, including 18,276 former Acts employees and 2,478 current or former residents, in an April 2022 data breach.

After discovering the data breach involving one of its internal data servers, Acts notified potentially affected individuals in July and October 2022, offering credit monitoring services and identity theft insurance.

"Following the incident, our information security team worked quickly to remediate the compromised server, prevent further activity and initiate an investigation to determine the nature and scope of this incident," an Acts statement released to *McKnight's Senior Living* read.

"Acts has continued to implement additional safeguards and enhancements on an ongoing basis with the assistance of external cybersecurity specialists to further strengthen our systems, much of the costs for which were addressed in the settlement discussion, and which will benefit Acts well



Acts has offered credit monitoring services and identity theft insurance to potential victims.

into the future," the statement continued.

Former employees Cara-Aimee Corra and Valarie Hanna filed a class action lawsuit in July 2022 in US District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania alleging that Acts was negligent in protecting information, including names, addresses, Social Security numbers, birth dates, financial account numbers and medical information accessed by hackers.

Corra and Hanna agreed to private mediation in March 2023, and a settlement was finalized in July 2023.

In addition to the cash payout, under the terms of the proposed settlement, Acts also would offer class members the opportunity to enroll in two years of credit monitoring and identity theft protection as well as enhanced monitoring of the dark web. ■

Ultrasound could aid Alzheimer's treatment

BY AARON DORMAN

The past year held major breakthroughs in Alzheimer's treatment, including new drugs. Now researchers may have found a way to deliver those drugs faster.

By using focused ultrasound technology, the researchers were able to "open" the blood-brain barrier and deliver more aducanumab (Aduhelm) in certain areas of the person's brain. In the brain regions that the ultrasound targeted — the scientists limited the ultrasound to one hemisphere — the treatment was more effective, according to the study appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Many Alzheimer's drugs, including adu-

canumab, target toxic beta-amyloid proteins that have built up in the brain, thought to be responsible for the disease and cognitive decline.

Early last year, the Food and Drug Administration approved lecanemab (Leqembi), which targets amyloid plaques in the early stages of the disease. The drug's effectiveness is promising enough that it has prompted a review of policies around how and when people can get PET scans.

The inability for many drugs to effectively cross the blood-brain barrier has meant that many treatments for Alzheimer's require stronger doses and more frequent therapies, the researchers noted. ■

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Assisted living communities are not healthcare providers nor protected from COVID-related lawsuits, judge rules

VIRGINIA - A wrongful death lawsuit alleging failure to comply with COVID-19 protocols can move forward after a circuit court judge ruled that assisted living communities are not healthcare providers and therefore not entitled to immunity from such legal action.

In a recent decision, Judge Douglas L. Fleming Jr. of the Loudoun County (VA) Circuit Court denied a motion to dismiss a Jan. 19, 2021, complaint filed against Tribute at One Loudoun and parent company Cadence Living, according to Virginia Lawyers Weekly. Cadence combined with Cogir Senior Living in late 2022.

According to the complaint, Frances Hamilton died from COVID-19 complications on Jan. 19, 2021. The complaint alleged that Hamilton contracted the virus at a community New Year's Eve party due to understaffing, substandard care and the community's failure to follow COVID protocols.

The community moved to dismiss the complaint on the basis that an expert opinion was not obtained by the plaintiff before bringing the wrongful death lawsuit against a healthcare provider as required by Virginia law. But in his Dec. 4 ruling, Fleming found that assisted living communities are not healthcare providers because they are not licensed as nursing homes or hospitals, nor do they employ licensed healthcare providers to "primarily" render healthcare services. "One only has to look at the statutory distinction between an assisted living facility and nursing homes," Fleming wrote in his opinion. "[W]hile each facility renders healthcare services, only a nursing home primarily does so."



The case alleged that a senior living resident contracted COVID-19 at a New Year's Eve party at the community where she lived.

Photo: Tetra Images/Getty Images

an industry rival," the Associated Press reported.

Meanwhile, in the state of California, all current pre- and post-hire noncompete agreements will be voided as of Feb. 14 under a bill recently signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom (D).

SOUTHEAST

Media scrutiny continues

GEORGIA - It's been a rough few months for the assisted living sector as lay media reports put a spotlight on the varying — or a lack of — regulations covering operators, a situation they said has led to tragic outcomes for some residents.

Georgia assisted living operators are the latest to come under scrutiny.

In 2019, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution published a series of stories critical of assisted living and Georgia's enforcement of state regulations. In the wake of that series, the state Legislature adopted a reform package that increased fines and requirements for assisted living operators in the state. A recent follow-up story, however, alleged persistent shortcomings and a seemingly "unhurried approach" in the state's oversight of assisted living and personal care facilities.

Industry advocates say that it is unfair to paint all providers with one brush, but they acknowledge that the attention is a reminder that "good policies and procedures, routine staff training, and oversight to ensure staff are following the policies are vital for providing great care."

This latest media spotlight on senior living providers follows the New York Times/KFF "Dying Broke" series in November about the cost of assisted living and the Washington Post's "Memory Inc." story package in December focusing on resident elopements at senior living communities.

Order emphasizes safety for residents, staff

MARYLAND - The well-being of older adults and members of the direct care workforce has become a top priority in Maryland with the recent signing of an executive order meant to address challenges related to the state's aging population. Senior living industry representatives say the effort has "tremendous" potential for operators in the state.

In January, Gov. Wes Moore (D) signed an order establishing the Longevity Ready Maryland initiative, which directs the state Department of Aging to prioritize the well-being of older adults, people living with disabilities and their caregivers.

WEST

Wage theft settlement tops \$5 million

CALIFORNIA - Almost 150 senior living caregivers in California will share in a \$5.5 million settlement, the state's largest judgment in a residential care facility wage theft case.

The settlement includes a \$2 million award announced Dec. 6 by the California labor commissioner's office, bringing the eventual payout to caregivers at Adat Shalom Board & Care to \$5.5 million. Adat Shalom operated six assisted living communities in West Hills, CA, and provided services for residents living with dementia or Parkinson's disease, as well as hospice care.

A seven-year investigation into the company found that from July 2014 to July 2017, live-in workers at the facilities were paid less than the minimum wage, were denied overtime and did not receive meal or rest breaks, according to the labor commissioner. The state said that workers cared for older adult residents 24 hours a day,

six days a week, but were only paid for six hours each day. The company also reportedly withheld pay rates and hours worked from pay stubs.

NORTHEAST

Governor vetoes noncompete ban

NEW YORK - Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) has vetoed a bill that would have banned most noncompete agreements in the state.

"In so doing, she called for modifications to the legislation that would protect 'middle-class and low-wage workers' from noncompete agreements, while balancing companies' interests in using such agreements with higher-wage earners," according to a blog post from attorneys at Ogletree Deakins.

The New York bill had been opposed by Wall Street businesses, which "argued the agreements are necessary to protect investment strategies and keep highly paid workers from leaving their companies with prized inside information and working for

Through the initiative, the state aims to build a longevity-ready and aging-friendly state by establishing new policies and programs, evaluating the efficacy of current services, identifying new support options for older adults and caregivers, and coordinating with public and private partners.

The initiative has a "tremendous" potential focus on the upside of aging and aging services, according to Maryland Center for Assisted Living President Joe DeMattos.

"The potential for the executive order is an important first step in focusing on people across settings, consumers across settings, and in integrating those settings so Marylanders know where to receive care and to receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time, relative to their aging process," DeMattos told *McKnight's Senior Living*.

MIDWEST

Legislation targets assaults on workers

MICHIGAN - New laws codify protections for healthcare workers assaulted on the job, which one senior living association said will positively affect the state's workforce shortage problem.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) recently signed into law two bills that create enhanced criminal fines for assaults, aggravated assaults and assaults with a deadly weapon against health professionals or volunteers while on the job.

HB 4520, sponsored by state Rep. Mike Mueller (R), increases fines against people who assault – without a weapon – health professionals or volunteers while on the job. HB 4521, sponsored by state Rep. Kelly Breen (D), increases fines against anyone who assaults health professionals or volunteers with a weapon.

In signing the bills, Whitmer said that healthcare workers face "rising rates of bullying, viciousness and violence." The Michigan Center for Assisted Living said that assault on healthcare professionals is becoming a more frequent problem.

"They afford protection across the healthcare spectrum – hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities – and are an important part of an overall effort to address the workforce shortage in healthcare," MCAL President and CEO Melissa Samuel told *McKnight's Senior Living*. The association, she said, "will

continue to advocate for and support legislation that makes it easier to attract and retain caregivers."

LeadingAge Michigan President and CEO David E. Herbel told *McKnight's Senior Living* that the bills extend specific consequences to licensed healthcare facilities, but all healthcare workers deserve protections.

"Workplace violence in healthcare has been an increasing problem since the pandemic and has consequences for the full range of senior care providers and professionals," Herbel said. "While we believe that these protections should be included to all congregate senior facilities and other healthcare arenas, focusing on licensed settings is a good start."

Both bills take effect in February.

At least 38 states have enhanced penalties for assaulting nurses, and several states apply enhanced penalties to assaults on specific healthcare workers or in specific settings.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is considering a rule to address workplace violence in assisted living and other long-term care and healthcare settings. ■

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My Turn | New hobbies can help residents preserve cognitive function

A new year often is thought of as a great time to pick up a new hobby, plan new adventures or set goals for the months ahead. The importance of trying new hobbies year-round cannot be overstated.

A recent study from Mercy Health shows that having too much time on our hands can negatively affect us. Engaging in challenging and novel activities can significantly improve memory function in older adults.

It is more important than ever for senior living communities to embrace vibrant living and support their residents with interesting programming. By making it easy for them to take up new hobbies, we support residents' experience and growth, which ultimately preserve and enhance their cognitive functions.



"It is more important than ever ... to ... support ... residents with interesting programming."

DORI RAY

Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and form new neural connections throughout life, has immense potential to keep our minds sharp as we age. When older adults engage in hobbies, there is a positive response from the brain as it forms and strengthens new neural connections.

Research has shown that regularly partaking in mentally challenging activities, such as learning to play an instrument, joining an art class, exploring different cultures or picking up a new language, can lead to improved cognitive function, particularly memory recall.

One of the many takeaways of the pandemic was the danger of isolation for the aging population. We learned that loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop

mental health challenges, as well as heart failure, cognitive decline and dementia, according to the surgeon general and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, respectively.

When older adults participate in new hobbies, they spend more time with others and increase their chances for forming lasting friendships. When people of all ages try something new, it stimulates their attention and interest. It is crucial for senior living communities to ask residents what they are interested in, because one person's idea of a fun activity could inspire others to join in.

Novel experiences trigger the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that plays a vital role in memory consolidation. ■

Dori Ray is corporate director of vibrant living at Brightview Senior Living.

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Catch up on the latest!

Editor's Column | Resolve to increase key vaccinations this year

If one of your new year's resolutions is to increase influenza and COVID-19 vaccination among residents and staff members in 2024, results of a new research study published in *JAMA Network Open* provide some tips:

- In discussions, lead off by talking about the more popular flu vaccine.
- Be consistent in your messaging about the safety and effectiveness of both vaccines.
- Address people's vaccine-specific beliefs, such as the limits of protection from prior COVID infections.

The research, which included a July survey of more than 2,000 adults, including 659 of whom were aged 50 or more years, 71% of the older adults said it was "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that they would get the flu vac-



"See the CDC's website for more information and resources."

LOIS A. BOWERS
Editor
McKnight's Senior Living
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cine, and 64% said it was very or somewhat likely that they would get the updated COVID vaccine.

The survey results also reveal the most common reasons that some respondents said they are hesitant about vaccination, which can help you with your talking points.

Among those 50 and older who said they were "not very likely" to get the flu vaccine, the top three reasons were that they would prefer to get natural immunity from becoming ill (35%), that they don't trust the government agencies that promote vaccination (33%) and that they feel as if people are expected to get too many vaccines in general (31%).

Among those 50 and older who said they were "not very likely" to get the COVID vaccine, the top three reasons were that

they want to see more research done on the vaccine (62%), that they are worried about the vaccine's safety (59%) and that they don't trust the government agencies that promote vaccination (55%).

Of course, other recent research also provides motivation for staying current with vaccines – for instance, a potential reduction in death risk and the potential avoidance of "long flu."

See the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website for more information and resources about COVID and flu vaccination for long-term care residents or workers – long-term care workers have relatively low vaccination rates compared with other healthcare personnel. ■

Follow Lois every Monday at www.mcknightseniorliving.com.



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Cartoon credit: Jonny Hawkins



Photo: Carbonero Stock/Getty Images

Financial, workforce challenges persist

Inflation, capital among leaders' concerns as 2024 gets underway.

BY LOIS A. BOWERS

Senior living operators will continue to face inflationary pressures and capital market challenges in 2024, but some effects may lessen before the year is out, according to industry experts. Expect the workforce-related issues that have dogged providers for years to persist, however, they said.

"The elevated interest rates driven by the Federal Reserve efforts to bring down inflationary pressures had a profound impact on the sector in 2023," National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care President and CEO Ray Braun told *McKnight's Senior Living*.

Noting the "significant demographic wave on the horizon," he said that the past year also saw record absorption of new senior housing inventory as it hit the market. "At the same time, we experienced a marked decline in new construction as well as transaction activity in 2023," Braun said. "The lending environment and overall cost of capital has been prohibitive and has been a definite headwind."

Capital still will be constrained early this year, he said, "but we are also hopeful that as the year progresses, we will start to see some improvement on this front."

National Center for Assisted Living Executive Director LaShuan Bethea singled out inflation as the top issue faced by the industry over the past year.

"Inflation has caused soaring labor costs, in addition to other expenses, and made it difficult for assisted living providers to compete for caregivers," she told *McKnight's Senior Living*. "As a result, assisted living communities have been

forced to use more contract nurses and staffing agencies, many of which are charging two or three times more than they charged prior to the pandemic."

As 2024 dawns, Bethea said, the financial challenges will continue.

"Inflation makes all other expenses in assisted living more expensive, from food to cleaning supplies," she said. "Additionally, the entire industry is still facing the ongoing ripple effects of skyrocketing costs from the pandemic."

Assisted living providers, Bethea said, managed their COVID-19 response with little support from the government. According to some estimates, assisted living communities collectively received approximately \$1 billion in relief funds, compared with the \$12.5 billion received by nursing homes, despite the fact that assisted living providers serve about the same number of older adults and incurred more than \$30 billion in pandemic losses and expenses.

"Federal and state policymakers provided little support to these communities in terms of personal protective equipment, testing and staff support," she said. "Those COVID-related expenses continue today."

American Seniors Housing Association President and CEO David Schless said that senior living providers continue to be confronted by "inflationary pressures across several key expense categories and a significant and rapid increase in interest rates."

"Ultimately, the top challenge in 2023 was related to the capital markets and liquidity challenges," he told *McKnight's Senior Living*, adding that he expected those issues to continue this year.

"While inflationary pressures appear to be moderating somewhat, the interest rate environment and overall capital market environment for all real estate-based assets will likely remain challenging," Schless said. "And we know there are many owners facing debt maturities in the upcoming year, which may prove to be extremely challenging with an ongoing liquidity crisis."

NIC believes that the industry will reach an inflection point this year and that a "reset" will occur, Braun said.

"There will be some distressed inventory and underwater loans that the market is going to have to work through," he said. "We think this reset is going to force a narrowing of the bid-ask spread and some reconciliation around equity contributions to stabilize outstanding debt."

A 'patchwork' system

From a broader perspective, LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan told *McKnight's Senior Living*, operators are challenged by "the shortcomings of our current patchwork system of delivering and financing long-term care."

The association for nonprofit providers across



LaShuan Bethea
National Center for Assisted Living



Ray Braun
National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care



David Schless
American Seniors Housing Association



Katie Smith Sloan
LeadingAge

the continuum of aging services is “doing all we can to raise up and urge policymakers and other stakeholders” to address the issue, she said.

“America is experiencing a massive demographic shift with implications for every aspect of society,” Sloan said. “Accessing quality long-term care is very often challenging, for many reasons. There is little political will to address these issues systemically, but policymakers are quick to criticize. Too often, aging services and providers are the scapegoat.”

Policymakers and members of the public must be educated about the industry as a whole as well as the differences between provider types, Sloan said.

“Ensuring that the public understands how long-term care is delivered and paid for — in a patchwork, inefficient system — and that the public appreciates the support that is needed, is critical,” she said. “And then advocating for long overdue change. We’re committed to doing everything we can to achieve that goal.”

Issues related to access and affordability also are on NIC’s radar screen, said Braun, who called them “an ongoing challenge for the sector.”

“NIC has been committed to defining and finding solutions for the middle-market consumer segment, and this work is more important than ever,” he said. “We need to be creative in finding solutions and models that are scalable and will bring forth greater access and options for the wave of baby boomers ahead.”

NIC funded a 2019 study by NORC at the University of Chicago that found that 54% of the 14.4 million middle-income older adults in 2029 in the United States will lack the financial resources to pay for senior housing and care, and a combination of public and private efforts will be needed to address the looming crisis.

More recently, Braun noted, NIC provided funding for the Housing for America’s Older Adults 2023 report, prepared by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. According to findings shared in that report, only 13% of adults aged 75 or more years who are living alone across 97 US metro areas can afford to move into an assisted living community without starting to cash in their assets.

NIC also has partnered with CVS Health to support a report from the Milken Institute, “Inno-

vative Financing and Care Models to Scale Affordable Housing Solutions for Middle Income Older Adults,” Braun added.

Intertwined with staffing issues

Access and affordability issues are intertwined with senior living’s perennial challenges related to staffing, Braun indicated.

“Staffing-related expenses continue to pressure margins, and there is sensitivity to how much of this expense can be passed along to the consumer,” he said, noting that in the first quarter of 2023, the percentage of assisted living rent increases surpassed the percentage of wage escalation.

“We went several years where wage increases consistently exceeded rent increases,” Braun said. “This is an ongoing challenge for operators, who need to ‘read the tea leaves’ and determine how far they can go in rent increases to cover some of these expenses without pricing themselves out of the market.”

Sloan cited labor issues — specifically, recruiting and retaining workers — as the top challenge that has faced senior living owners and operators over the past year. And those issues affect access, she said.

“These challenges are particularly acute in senior living communities that provide skilled nursing and home healthcare,” such as continuing care retirement/life plan communities or assisted living communities where home- and community-based services are provided, Sloan said. “Insufficient reimbursement rates, coupled with a highly competitive labor market, make for a very tough operating environment. Members are having to make hard choices — which service lines to continue, what to reduce — in order to maintain operations. That prospect of limiting older adults and families’ access to much-needed care is really antithetical to our members’ mission. Yet without staff, there is no care.”

NCAL’s Bethea noted that assisted living providers and those they could serve are feeling the pain as well.

“While the assisted living workforce has recovered in many areas, workforce shortages still remain a top challenge, especially in rural areas,” she said. “Rural areas do not have as many people in general, let alone the qualified caregivers

“We need to be creative in finding solutions and models that are scalable and will bring forth greater access.”

Ray Braun
NIC President and CEO

needed to support the communities' seniors. As a result, assisted living providers are having to compete with other healthcare sectors for new hires or make the tough decision to limit admissions."

Limiting move-ins, Bethea said, "leaves vulnerable residents displaced from their long-standing communities, as well as reduces their options for quality care. ...Families are left scrambling to find new care options and often must travel farther to visit their loved one."

NCAL, she added, is working with its state affiliates and individual providers to try to find solutions to address workforce challenges so that older adults' access to assisted living is protected.

Mandate effects outside of nursing homes

Both Sloan and Bethea cited the federal government's proposed minimum staffing mandate for nursing homes as a potential challenge for other types of providers along the long-term care continuum.

"There's a bit of irony here. I've spent my career in this sector and finally — a true first in a long time — the federal government is focused on aging services and older adults' access to quality care," Sloan said. "But the Biden administration is not making the right choices."

At LeadingAge's annual meeting in November, Sloan said that even though the staffing mandate proposed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services directly would apply only to nursing homes, senior living and other providers would be affected because they are "fishing from the same pool" of workers and "there are just not enough people to hire."

In December, she told *McKnight's Senior Living* that "decisions are being made that will have far-reaching impact and potentially negative unintended consequences."

Bethea predicted that the proposed mandate will be senior living's top challenge this year.

"With the impending Biden administration's staffing mandate for nursing homes, assisted living communities are at risk of losing staff," she said. "No matter where an assisted living community sits on this continuum, a federal minimum staffing mandate threatens to take away the essential staff on which these communities depend to provide high-quality care for millions of residents."

And because labor shortages can lead operators to curtail admissions, Bethea said, another top challenge for the industry will be to rebuild the capacity to accept new residents.

"As [the] workforce slowly recovers, assisted living providers must do everything they can to effectively communicate that they are willing and able to accept new residents," she said.

ASHA continues to pursue a variety of legislative solutions to workforce challenges, including immigration reform, Schless said. "Of course, the politics of immigration reform are extremely chal-

lenging," he added, noting that, with 2024 being an election year, "getting any significant legislation enacted is unlikely," although "ASHA will continue to look for any opportunities that may add new foreign workers to the workforce."

Although the situation has improved from the previous two to three years, Braun said, labor issues continue to be a "pressure point" for operators.

"We have seen year-over-year wage increases come down from record highs, and a number of operators are reporting reduced agency dependency, but the challenges have not gone away," he said.

Operators, Braun said, "need to be better about reducing turnover and ultimately improving the experience of our workforce, which in the end will pay dividends."

Looking to the future

Looking toward the future, Braun said that the industry is "going to have to refine the owner-operator relationship in some cases."

"We remain a fragmented space with many different owners and operators, and those relationships can be complicated depending on experience in the sector and generally a limited set of industry standards for measuring and defining quality," he continued. "NIC is working with some others on this very topic. We think it will be critical to advance the sector in this regard as we prepare for the wave of new development that will come once the capital starts to free up."

Look for the topics to be covered at the 2024 NIC Spring Conference, Braun said.

Meanwhile, Sloan said that LeadingAge members "are laser-focused on reimagining themselves for the future."

"We know that the majority of Americans want to age in community, in their homes. That's an opportunity for providers across the spectrum," she said. "The big question for our members is determining the path that is consistent with their mission and sets them up to be successful well into the future. It's really about making the smart and strategic choices and executing on them while at the same time navigating workforce shortages and other pressing issues."

To educate potential residents and their families about senior living options, Schless said, ASHA will be re-launching a "completely overhauled" version of its consumer website, *Where You Live Matters*, this year.

Bethea said that quality will remain a top focus for NCAL and its members in 2024.

"Assisted living continues to deliver high-quality care in a safe, homelike setting that offers the ability to meet residents' needs," she added. "The only thing the current labor shortage has impacted is access to care, not quality. The caregivers in our assisted living communities are dedicated individuals who are committed to continuous quality improvement." ■

"The only thing the current labor shortage has impacted is access to care, not quality."

LaShuan Bethea
NCAL Executive Director



Focus On BRIEFS

» People with diabetes increasingly want RPM

With remote patient monitoring proving to be an effective way of mitigating health emergencies, a majority (71%) of Americans living with diabetes also would prefer more quantitative measures for glucose levels and other health metrics.

That was a finding of the 2023 Diabetes Care Survey released in November and conducted by device maker SmartMeter.

A remote monitoring device conceivably would help those living with diabetes — including 16 million older adults — or their clinicians keep regular, more accurate data.

» Johns Hopkins grants will support AI solutions for older patients

More than \$1 million in new funding from the Johns Hopkins Artificial Intelligence and Technology Collaboratory for Aging Research is being spent on projects to support the development of AI to promote the health of older patients, Health IT Analytics recently reported.

The JH AITC launched in 2021 after receiving \$20 million from the National Institute on Aging. Since then, it has established itself as a center for innovation for aging and collaboration among the Johns Hopkins community.

The new funding will focus on creating AI-based devices and innovation surrounding aging studies and support research into how best to use AI to address cognitive decline.

» AI keeps older adults safer under the watchful eye of smart lamps

Argentum reports that several singularly tasked artificial intelligence solutions now are making senior living and care safer, according to Design-Milk.com.

Nobi Smart Lamps, for example, deliver smart lighting paired with adaptive technology to aid in the care of older adults.

"With an increasing senior population and a scarcity of trained caretakers, robot caretakers may one day become the norm," a website report noted. "In the interim, Nobi's smart lamps and other technologies offer a pragmatic solution to keeping a discreet eye on senior adults at risk of falling." If a fall is verified, then Nobi notifies a caregiver via an app for live assistance.



Photo: Ridofranz/Getty Images

Older adult use of telehealth approaches pandemic peak

Survey is first indication that adoption of the technology is near-universal, according to the experts

BY AARON DORMAN

Almost all older adults in the United States, an astonishing 97%, had at least one telehealth appointment this year, a new survey indicates.

The data, which come from remote platform operator Independence, indicates that telehealth usage among older adults has grown 20% over the past three years, almost back up to the pandemic-era peak, when in-person options were not available.

Experts have expected telehealth options to trend upward among older adults, although this is the first indication that telehealth use is near-universal.

As recently as last winter, other reports were showing that both older adults and their clinicians remained skeptical of using remote options for check-ins or appointments.

The new study from Independence doesn't indicate that older adults have switched to remote visits for all their clinical needs, but 98% of survey respondents said that the telehealth visits, which often shaved an hour or more off of their appointment times, improved their relationship with their

physician(s), and a similarly high percentage of older adults said that they are ready to incorporate artificial intelligence into their healthcare, the Independence data show.

"Our findings show telehealth has indeed become a vital component of modern healthcare," Kian Saneii, founder and CEO of Independence, said in a statement. "Convenience, ease of setup, significant time savings and ability to improve doctor-patient relationships are all powerful drivers of telehealth adoption."

Although concerns exist about the complex health needs of older adults and whether physicians can make accurate remote judgments, it is much easier to set up those remote visits and also less likely that older adults will miss such virtual appointments, the data indicated.

Although older adults may be turning more to telehealth visits, they also are less likely to make follow-up telehealth appointments, one study showed earlier this year. That finding, however, may have occurred because many telehealth appointments are for brief consultations for issues such as nutrition. ■



**Focus On
BRIEFS**

» **Trust helps increase vaccination rate**

A significant challenge to increasing COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus vaccination rates in workers and residents is that many people now tend to equate COVID-19 with catching a cold, Argentum Vice President of Government Relations Paul Williams told *McKnight's Senior Living*.

Williams said that Argentum is hearing that communities with strong leadership often have higher vaccination rates, and that staff members who trust and respect community leaders are more receptive to calls for vaccination and the importance of helping to protect residents and colleagues in the community.

» **CDC draft guidance on N95 masks 'outrages' healthcare workers, scientists**

Nurses, researchers and workplace safety officers worry new guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention might reduce healthcare worker protection against the coronavirus and other airborne pathogens.

The brouhaha began after a CDC advisory committee's November update to 2007 hospital infection control standards was released for public comment. A point of contention was a statement that N95 face masks are equivalent to looser, surgical face masks in certain settings, and that doctors and nurses need to wear only surgical masks when treating patients infected by "common, endemic" viruses, such as an influenza. The committee was slated to vote on the changes at a public meeting near press time.

» **Coating boosts hand barrier protection**

Researchers have developed a long-lasting skin coating agent that kills pathogens on the hands, possibly paving the way for new hand hygiene practices.

Scientists at Japan's Kao Corp. said the new lactic acid-based agent uses a process similar to that occurring when humans sweat. The relatively high temperature of the hands disrupts the membrane of microbes and makes it permeable to lactic acid, which then lowers the internal pH of the microbe and causes DNA damage and metabolic problems.

The complete study was set to be published in the November issue of *Environmental Technology & Innovation*.



Photo: SDI Productions/Getty Images

Providers advised to evaluate worker classifications

New rule changes how senior living companies and other employers determine who is an employee and who is an independent contractor

BY KIMBERLY BONVISSUTO

A large national trade group advocating for senior living and other long-term care providers is urging its members to "carefully evaluate their existing classifications" of workers following the Jan. 9 announcement of a new federal rule pertaining to independent contractors.

The rule, which will change how senior living companies and other employers determine who is an employee and who is an independent contractor, is effective March 11.

"The Department of Labor has put a strong emphasis on ensuring proper classification, and we can expect those efforts to continue," LeadingAge Vice President of Legal Affairs Jonathan Lips told *McKnight's Senior Living*. "Now that the final rule is released, we are carefully reviewing the content and its implications for providers and urge our members to carefully evaluate their existing classifications based on the new regulations."

The rule comes as senior living providers continue to face workforce shortages and sometimes turn to staffing agencies for help.

Another association, Argentum, said that the rule "unfortunately" will result in many

workers being unfairly classified as employees and "depriving them of their choice of the manner in which they wish to work."

"The senior living industry lost hundreds of thousands of jobs during the pandemic, and while the situation is gradually improving, many communities are still struggling to recruit, hire and retain employees," said Argentum Senior Vice President of Public Policy Maggie Elehwany.

"We are concerned that the rule, coupled with other proposed federal regulations, will only serve to exacerbate the workforce shortage and wipe out some of the recent modest gains communities have made in recruiting individuals to help care for our seniors," she added.

Additional experts are concerned that providers will face greater legal and financial burdens under the rule, which largely mirrors the rule the Labor Department proposed in October 2022, retaining the framework it laid out for determining independent contractor status versus employee status.

The new rule also rescinds one issued during the final days of the Trump administration in January 2021. ■

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**Focus On
BRIEFS**

» **Caregivers of people who experience a severe stroke** experience high levels of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress in the first year after the person leaves the hospital, a new study finds. The study was led by a team from Michigan Medicine and published in *Neurology*. In it, researchers say that almost 30% of the caregivers went on to have major psychological distress in the year after a loved one survived a stroke. The results come as no surprise, because stroke can have devastating impacts on a person. It can cause permanent disability or death. "As physicians, we usually concentrate on our patients, and it is important to recognize that caregivers may have long-term consequences from a loved one's severe illness," Lewis Morgenstern, MD, a professor of neurology, neurosurgery and emergency medicine at University of Michigan Medical School and professor of epidemiology at the U-M School of Public Health, said in a statement.

» **Whether they move to a senior living community** or nursing home or live at home in the community at large, older adults living with dementia often need friends and family members to become more literate about their care plans and health regimens. University researchers are testing a new digital tool that has been designed to help any caregivers of people living with dementia. The online tool works to help navigate the complex maze of regulatory and legal considerations that come with memory care. Although the tool is aimed primarily at individuals' family members, long-term care providers also figure to benefit via improved comprehension that winds up enabling better communication among all involved caregivers. To study the tool's efficacy, the National Institute on Aging has bestowed a \$3.5 million grant on Emory University's Neil Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing, the recipients announced in December.

» **Light therapy is associated with significant improvement** in sleep and psychobehavioral symptoms in people living with Alzheimer's disease, according to a review published online Dec. 6 in *PLOS ONE*. Lili Zang, from Weifang Medical University in China, and colleagues conducted a systematic literature review to identify studies evaluating the efficacy of light therapy on sleep disorders and psychobehavioral symptoms and found light therapy "promising" for those with Alzheimer's.



Photo: Bloomberg/Contributor/Getty Images

Senate hearing, OIG report target substance use disorders

Both reveal that older adults need more help than ever when it comes to getting the treatment they need to address such issues

BY KIMBERLY MARSELAS

A congressional hearing and a new report issued by a government watchdog show that older adults need more help accessing care for substance use disorders, finding providers willing to treat them and getting required services covered.

Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA), chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, noted that almost 4 million older adults reported having a substance use disorder in 2022, with 1.8 million of those involving drug use. Mortality from drug overdoses among older adults also more than tripled between 2000 and 2022, he added, citing federal data.

"Older adults are not immune to these issues, and this a growing and evolving crisis in America," Casey said in opening the recent hearing of the committee, which focused both on access to opioids and gaps in care.

"Older adults tend to be overlooked for substance use disorders in typical screenings and prevention efforts, even though they are more susceptible to developing substance use disorders than other age groups and at a higher risk of undiagnosed

and untreated substance use disorders," he added. "The people, the problems and the solutions remain largely invisible to our society."

Long-term care facilities increasingly are being called on to treat patients who have substance use disorders.

The recent hearing coincided with the publication of an annual brief from the Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General that examines access to treatment for opioid use disorder and the opioid overdose-reversal drug naloxone.

It found that about 52,000 Medicare enrollees experienced an opioid overdose in 2022. Of the 1.1 million enrollees who have opioid use disorder, just 18% received medication to treat that disorder. In some states, the OIG found far lower access. Florida was the worst, with just 6% receiving treatment medication.

Although naloxone has been an important tool in addressing the nation's opioid crisis — one Senate witness credited it with "saving countless Americans from death" — it became an over-the-counter medication last year. ■

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Expanding excellence in assisted living

Sheryl Zimmerman, MSW, PhD, executive director of the newly established CEAL@UNC, recently spent a few minutes with *McKnight's Senior Living* Content Editor Kimberly Bonvissuto discussing how the organization is working to develop evidence, bolster the workforce and promote evidence-based practices and policies in assisted living.

Q: What benefits have you seen in the transition of the national Center for Excellence in Assisted Living to CEAL@UNC?

A: We have more capacity. CEAL began in 2003 as a result of the first recommendation in the landmark Assisted Living Workgroup report, delivered to the US Senate Special Committee on Aging. CEAL had a management company that was helping all of these volunteers undertake all the initiatives that they did. Now, with the capacity of UNC and me as the executive director, we have established oversight and expertise that is broader than the volunteer efforts of all the people who are still part of CEAL.

Q: What have been the biggest changes in assisted living since CEAL was launched?

A: A few changes come to mind. Affordable assisted living and public dollars, Medicaid, is a change. Regulations didn't exist, so that's been a big change.

The third thing that comes to mind is how the social model of care is important, quality of life is important. But now we've all come to recognize that people

who lived in assisted living have always had healthcare needs. Now it's moving away from just saying it's just a social model of care, and recognizing the totality of the care needs of people who are getting supportive care in residential communities that aren't nursing homes.

Q: What work is going on at CEAL@UNC right now?

A: There are three initiatives.

CEAL had already started compiling – in relation to the HCBS settings final rule from CMS – all of the state transition plans in a standardized manner. CEAL@UNC is finishing that effort on our website. We'll probably write a synthesis on those.

Another effort involves recommendations for medical and mental healthcare that were published in *JAMA*. Many organizations put together a coalition to share the recommendations outside of the paper and give people tools about them. They are very feasible recommendations. CEAL@UNC is moving forward with the Be Well in AL coalition, which is developing toolkits, and we will make them publicly available.

Regarding the third initiative, I've been doing research in assisted living for 30 years now,



**SHERYL ZIMMERMAN,
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and there are thousands of articles available on assisted living, most of them behind paywalls. We are posting the abstracts and short translations that I hope will help providers, policy-makers and advocates.

Researchers know the research. We work to understand regulations and talk to regulators and try to talk with consumers on a regular basis, but there's no organized way to do that. With national "cores," we're bringing together individuals and organizations who want to participate in or learn about the areas of consumer, practice, policy and research.

Q: What trends in assisted living do you see going into 2024?

A: One thing is the Be Well In AL initiative. We've got to be more mindful in a practical, pragmatic, feasible way across the whole scope of assisted living, small to large, private to nonprivate, about how we're addressing care needs in practical ways.

Recently, issues have come out about cost. They need to be addressed, which goes back to accessibility.

Regulations are evolving in a way that's timely for what the care needs are and how the settings are operated.

And none of us can have a conversation without talking about workforce and training.

Q: Are there any final points you'd like to share?

A: One thing I love about this field is that all the industry organizations are talking to each other. There's going to be more need for that going forward. Assisted living is the largest provider of residential long-term care. We all need to be working together.

CEAL is still CEAL. CEAL@UNC means we have an established infrastructure to be responsive to needs and to bring research to practice and policy. We welcome input. We welcome anyone who wants to be part of this broad mission.

This Q&A has been edited for length and other considerations. The entire interview is available at <https://www.mcknightsseniorliving.com/print-issue-archive/>.

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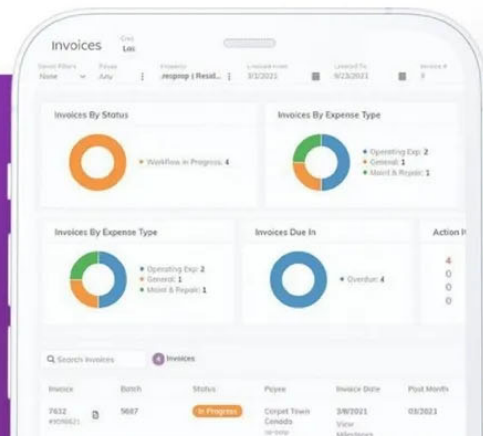
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