**KEY MESSAGES**

Nursing Home Quality and Staff Ratios

Provided by LeadingAge, our national partner

Dec. 5, 2022

**Nursing Homes Can and Should Be Bastions of Quality Health Care and Quality of Life**

Our goal, which many LeadingAge members meet, is for every nursing home in the country to be a place where any of us would be comfortable living—or have a family member stay—if we needed the level of 24/7 care that they provide. Nursing homes should provide top-quality person-centered care, delivered by qualified staff, in a physical setting that reinforces the dignity and well-being of residents, so they can lead lives of purpose.

**Older Adults and Families Deserve a Transparent Nursing Home System**

As the need for a quality residential environment grows ever more critical, we must, as a country, renew our commitment to upholding the dignity and rights of older adults – particularly those who live in nursing homes. These individuals deserve nothing short of quality care and support that enables them to live lives of well-being and gives their families peace of mind that they are in good hands. We support oversight of providers to assist chronic poor performers to improve, change management or close. We also  believe that consumers must be able to rely on an easily understandable and navigable system to assess nursing home quality and distinguish between high and low-performing nursing homes. That system must promote transparency of all aspects of the quality assurance process.

**It is Time to Reexamine How our Nation Delivers, Regulates and Measures the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes**

Nursing homes are regulated and surveyed with a system designed for the 20th century. It is a punitive approach that is arcane and broken. We support the current work by the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/the-quality-of-care-in-nursing-homes) on Quality of Care in Nursing Homes which includes investigations into the current regulatory structures and how they link to care outcomes; consistency of oversight, enforcement and penalties; whether current nursing home payment models support delivery of high-quality care and regulatory compliance; evidence about which interventions produce high-quality care in nursing homes; the effectiveness of survey and certification structures and methods, including the training of surveyors; the workforce and competencies needed to deliver high-quality care in nursing homes, and the challenges in ensuring an adequate workforce in nursing homes and survey agencies.

**Nursing Homes Are an Important Part of Our Healthcare System**

We’ll always need residential care for people who cannot remain in their own home, for whatever reason. The U.S. nursing home system was set up during a time of shorter lifespans and faster health declines, but today, fully half of us will need some kind of paid caregiving over the course of our life. America’s population is rapidly aging and more of us—especially once we’re over age 85—will live with frailty, dementia or other chronic conditions that require more care than our families can provide. The need for a quality residential environment is growing ever more critical.

**Our Society has Long Undervalued Nursing Homes, and the Caregivers Who Work in Them**

For most Americans, attitudes about nursing homes are shaped by fear of getting older and societal ageism that devalues older lives. This negative bias toward aging, combined with outdated funding models and under-investment in the nursing home infrastructure, has led to systemic, chronic undervaluing of nursing homes workers. Those workers have been further marginalized because caregiving itself—which is provided primarily by women, especially women of color—is also often overlooked, taken for granted or dismissed as unskilled labor.

**Frontline Workers Are the Heart of Nursing Homes, and Need and Deserve More Support**

Direct care workers provide the majority of care in nursing homes. Caring for older adults in nursing homes requires not only a specialized understanding of their healthcare and functional needs, but also a dedication to their multidimensional quality-of-life needs. Aides and nursing assistants are professional caregivers who provide the intimate, hands-on care that is fundamental to long-stay nursing home care. Yet direct care workers—in nursing homes and other settings—remain so poorly compensated that 1 in 8 lived in poverty and more than half received public benefits in 2018.

**Nursing Homes are Navigating an Unsustainable Public Funding Model**

Most nursing homes provide two types of care: long-term residential care, and short-stay services after a hospitalization. In the U.S., most revenue comes from three sources: 1) Medicare, 2) Medicaid, and 3) private pay. Medicaid is the joint federal and state government payor for over 80% of nursing home residents, but virtually no state pays nursing homes enough under Medicaid to cover actual costs. The cost of what it takes to provide quality care just doesn’t square with reimbursement rates. (Note that a very small fraction of nursing home care is paid for with private long-term care insurance.)