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United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

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May 18, 2023

Brian C. Moyer, PhD
Director
National Center for Health Statistics
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
3311 Toledo Road
Hyattsville, MD 20782-2064

Dear Dr. Moyer:

Each day, more than 10,000 Americans turn 65.¹ Those ages 80 and older are the fastest growing demographic segment with a growth rate twice that for people aged 65 years and older, and nearly four times that of the total population.² By 2035, the number of seniors will exceed the number of children for the first time in American history.³ This monumental demographic shift will present an unprecedented long-term care challenge. To begin to adequately prepare for it, we must first understand the landscape of settings of care that are currently available, and critical factors about each to help older Americans and their family members make informed decisions about their futures.

The National Post-acute and Long-Term Care Study (NPALS), biennially produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), provides a unique window into the spectrum of care currently available from nursing homes and assisted living to adult day services and home health agencies. I ask you to consider adding new rigorous questions to the survey that will help us better understand the industry, ultimately supporting older Americans to find quality and affordable care.

When families find themselves having to make heart heavy and deep pocket decisions about how to get the right care for a loved one, they require access to accurate, up-to-date, and transparent information about the options ahead. Americans want to know how much care will cost, whether they can trust quality measures, and how the government ensures our most vulnerable seniors are safe while in nursing homes.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (April 27, 2022). Aging. <https://www.hhs.gov/aging/index.html>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023). <https://www.cdc.gov/training/ACP/page40448.html>. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

³ Vespa, J (March 18, 2018). The Graying of America: More Older Adults Than Kids by 2035. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/03/graying-america.html>.

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The federal government also has a stake in the ground. Through Medicare and Medicaid, the government funds 52 percent of nursing home care. New proposals seek to funnel more federal dollars into Medicaid Home and Community Based Services. Before putting more money into an opaque system, we must take stock of current ownership structures across settings of care and how they affect health and wellbeing outcomes.

The National Center for Health Statistics, as a statistical agency with no role as payer or regulator, is uniquely positioned to help Congress better understand quality and ownership of long-term care facilities and providers through the National post-acute and Long-Term Care Study (NPALS). I ask you to answer the following questions by June 16, 2023:

1. In the 2018 survey, residential care facilities provided much lower response rates than adult day services: 30 percent versus 50 percent. In the 2020 survey, NCHS used strategies to improve the response rate, and 45 percent of residential care facilities responded.⁴ How can NCHS continue to improve the response rates among residential care facilities in future surveys?
2. The NCHS' National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) includes questions about costs to consumers. NCHS produces reports based on the NHIS analyzing problems paying medical bills among the population at large⁵, and among selected groups, such as veterans.⁶ However NPALS' Residential Care Community Services User Questionnaire does not ask consumers about their costs of staying in residential care.⁷ Which questions could NCHS add to the questionnaire to better understand residents' costs?
3. Which administrative data or questions could NCHS add to NPALS to better understand costs according to types of residential care facility, according to the questions already on the questionnaire, including type of ownership, number of residents, number of beds, number of meals served, *et cetera*?
4. NPALS asks several questions about residents' health status and use of services. If NPALS included questions about costs to consumers, how could NCHS use these data, and quality data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) Nursing Home Surveys of residents and family members⁸ to analyze consumers' ability to identify whether they are paying for quality care?

⁴ National Center for Health Statistics (2020). 2020 National Post-acute and Long-term Care Study Survey Methodology for the Adult Day Services Center and Residential Care Community Components. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/npals/2020-NPALS-methodology-documentation-508.pdf>.

⁵ Cohen RA, Cha AE (January 18, 2023). Problems Paying Medical Bills, United States, 2021. National Health Statistics Reports No. 180. Hyattsville MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

⁶ Cohen RA, Boersma P (March 22, 2023). Financial Burden of Medical Care Among Veterans Aged 25–64, by Health Insurance Coverage: United States, 2019–2021. National Health Statistics Reports No. 182. Hyattsville MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

⁷ National Center for Health Statistics (2022). National Post-acute and Long-term Care Study 2022 Residential Care Community User Questionnaire. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/npals/2022-NPALS-RCC-Questionnaire-Resident.pdf>

⁸ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2022). CAHPS Nursing Home Surveys. <https://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/surveys-guidance/nh/index.html>. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

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5. Is NCHS able to estimate which facilities are more likely to respond versus not respond by characteristics such as ownership type, size, or payer mix?
6. The NPALS 2022 Residential Care Community Questionnaire offers respondents four choices of type of ownership: Private nonprofit, private for-profit, publicly traded company or Limited Liability Company (LLC), and government (federal, state, and local).⁹ Given the complex ownership structures identified by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), how can NCHS improve the NPALS question about type of ownership to better discover the truth about facility ownership, without suppressing the response rate?
7. In reporting the 2020 NPALS, NCHS reported variance in adult day services center participant characteristics by type of ownership.¹⁰ However, NCHS did *not* report by type of ownership for residential care communities.¹¹ The NPALS Residential Care Community Questionnaire *did* ask the question about type of ownership.¹² When does NCHS expect to publish a report on variance in adult day services center participant characteristics by type of ownership for the 2020 NPALS?

The answers to these questions will help shed light on the complex and fragmented webs of long-term care in the United States and ultimately help Americans make better decisions for their own futures and those of their loved ones. If you have any questions please contact John R. Graham (john_graham@aging.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Mike Braun
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

⁹ National Center for Health Statistics (2022). National Post-acute and Long-term Care Study 2022 Residential Care Community Provider Questionnaire. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/npals/2022-NPALS-RCC-Questionnaire-Community.pdf>

¹⁰ Singh P, Lu Z, Sengupta M. Variation in adult day services center participant characteristics by center ownership: United States, 2020. NCHS Data Brief, no 453. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2022. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:122046>.

¹¹ Caffrey C, Melekin A, Lu Z, Sengupta M (2022) Variation in residential care community resident characteristics, by size of community: United States, 2020. NCHS Data Brief, no 454. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:121910>.

¹² National Center for Health Statistics (2022). National Post-acute and Long-term Care Study 2022 Residential Care Community Questionnaire. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.