

## **USA Today: Investigation on Fall/Winter 2020 Surge & Facility Score Card AHCA/NCAL Talking Points February 2022**

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### **The Issue**

- Investigative reporters at USA Today are working on a series on how nursing homes handled the Fall/Winter COVID Surge in 2020 (October 2020 – January 2021).
- The piece will examine cases and deaths, especially among the largest nursing home companies and REITs.
- As part of the investigation, USA Today is launching a searchable facility database giving each nursing home in the country grades on deaths, infections, and staffing during this timeframe based on various government sources and methodology developed by the reporters.
- The series will also include a consumer guide with tips on how potential residents and families can search for care, what to look for, etc.

### **Key Messages:**

- Much has changed since the timeframe for this report, including the distribution of life-saving vaccines.
- It's time to stop cherry picking past information and placing blame on nursing homes for a once-in-a-century global pandemic.
- Instead, the focus must be on meaningful solutions that can improve the care residents receive and encouraging policymakers to prioritize long term care for the resources our nation's seniors deserve.

### **Talking Points:**

- Independent, academic researchers have consistently [found](#) that COVID outbreaks in nursing homes are primarily correlated with the spread of the virus in the surrounding community.
  - Facility ownership, tax status, government ratings, and previous citations are not determining factors for COVID-19 outbreaks, as these studies found.
- This investigative piece focused on a specific, short period of time during a historic multi-year pandemic (fall/winter surge 2020):
  - when throughout the general population cases were rampant, deaths were at their height, and widespread availability of vaccines did not yet exist.
  - when nursing home providers were pleading with public health officials for resources to help protect their residents and staff, such as testing, personal protective equipment, and staffing support, but little aid was provided.

- Much has changed since this timeframe:
  - the distribution of life-saving vaccines, making long term care facilities much safer.
    - Nearly 90% of nursing home residents are now fully vaccinated.
    - This helped protect thousands of residents from the latest Omicron surge when infected residents were four (4) times less likely to succumb from the virus.
  - Additionally, there is now clearer federal guidance on testing frequency, isolation protocols, responding to new variants, the use of masks, and much more to help curb the spread of COVID-19 in long term care.
- COVID-19 viciously targets our nation's most vulnerable—the elderly and those with underlying conditions—precisely the individuals who reside in America's nursing homes.
- To suggest that our frontline heroes did not do enough to prevent these deaths fails to recognize the nature of this virus as well as how public health officials neglected to direct resources to where the greatest tragedy occurred.
- If potential residents and their loved ones are searching for a nursing home, consider where we are in this pandemic now and how facilities are moving forward from here.
- There are many great tools and resources already at consumers' disposal:
  - [OurSeniorCare.org](https://www.ourSeniorCare.org) is a great resource to find long term care facilities in your area. This website also includes additional resources, FAQs, and a [checklist](#) of questions to ask staff when looking at potential facilities.
  - [Medicare's Care Compare website](#), which features the government's Five-Star Quality Rating System, can also be a helpful tool and starting point.
- However, consumers should not rely on the internet exclusively when choosing a long term care facility for themselves or a loved one.
- Visiting a center is the best way to learn about the specific services provided, ask staff, families and residents questions, get a feel for the environment, and learn about their COVID protocols.
- It's time we stop cherry picking past information and placing blame on nursing homes for a once-in-a-century global pandemic.
- Together, let's focus on meaningful solutions that can improve the care residents receive and encourage policymakers to prioritize long term care for the resources our nation's seniors deserve.