

# Nursing Home Quality Improvement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Heroic Caregivers Protected Seniors and Improved Care

America’s nursing home caregivers delivered on quality improvements for residents, even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did these health care heroes go above and beyond to help protect their residents from the virus, but they also **spent more time with residents** and **continued to make clinical advancements**, despite an unprecedented global crisis.

The nature of COVID-19, which spreads through asymptomatic carriers and uniquely targets older adults with comorbidities, led to the tragic loss of life in nursing homes during the pandemic. Additionally, any declines in specific aspects of residents’ health can likely be attributed to government restrictions and measures that kept residents isolated and confined to their rooms—not because of inadequate care from our frontline heroes.

Nursing home caregivers are actively regaining ground now to help residents get back on their feet and reengaged with loved ones and social activities, but they need ongoing support. Through [meaningful investments and policy solutions](#) to long term care, we can learn from this pandemic and continue to enhance the quality of care delivered in America’s nursing homes.

### Bottom line:

Nursing home caregivers are heroes for their efforts during the pandemic. They should be commended and supported.

### Quality Improvements During the Pandemic:

#### ► Quality Measures for

#### Long-Stay Residents

**15 %** ▼ hospitalizations

**8 %** ▼ urinary tract infections

**12 %** ▼ catheter use

#### Short-Stay Patients

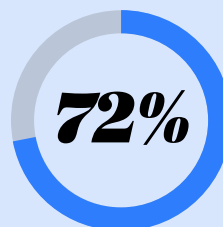
**8 %** ▲ functional improvement

#### ► Staffing: During the first 9 months of 2020:

*“The number of nurse staff hours per resident day remained steady or, if anything, increased slightly during the pandemic.”*

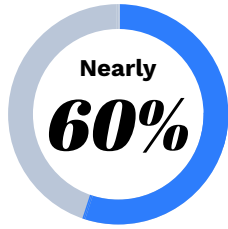
– (Nursing Home Staffing Levels Did Not Change Significantly During COVID-19).

#### ► Infection Control



of the more than **110,000** infection control focused inspections of nursing homes conducted from 2020-2022 were **deficiency free**

## COVID-19's Vicious Nature



of nursing home resident deaths due to COVID occurred during the first 7 months of a multi-year pandemic, before vaccines were available.

- ▶ COVID uniquely targets the elderly population and those with underlying conditions.

**340x**  
higher

the risk of COVID mortality for those 85 years and older is significantly higher than for those 18-29.

**85**  
years old

the average age of residents and almost everyone has an underlying health condition – if not **multiple chronic conditions**.



Independent research from various respected academic institutions consistently found that high spread in the community led to outbreaks in nursing homes.

- ▶ Life-saving vaccines:

**4x**  
▼

at the height of the Omicron surge in mid-January, residents were 4x less likely to succumb to the virus compared to the height of the winter surge in 2020, before the availability of vaccines.

**730,000+**  
nursing home residents  
have recovered from COVID

## The Toll of the Pandemic

Before vaccines were available and with widespread government restrictions, metrics declined on quality measures for weight loss, need for help with daily activities, and ability to move independently among long-stay residents. Let's not forget - **the federal government closed nursing homes to visitors and made nursing home staff keep residents in their room** in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For nearly a year, residents were not allowed to:

- see their family and friends in-person
- participate in group activities
- move freely around the nursing home
- eat socially in the dining room with their fellow residents

It is no surprise that this could cause residents to become more depressed, eat less and lose weight, and lose some of their mobility. **Any person's mental and physical health would be impacted under such government restrictions.** In fact, a [study](#) from Brown University found that depression rates among all U.S. adults tripled during the first year of COVID-19 and [another](#) found that Americans' physical health was also suffering.

Despite these negative impacts due to the virus and government restrictions, **these quality measures are already showing improvements** during the most recent quarters of available data and the **other quality measures stayed the same or improved.**