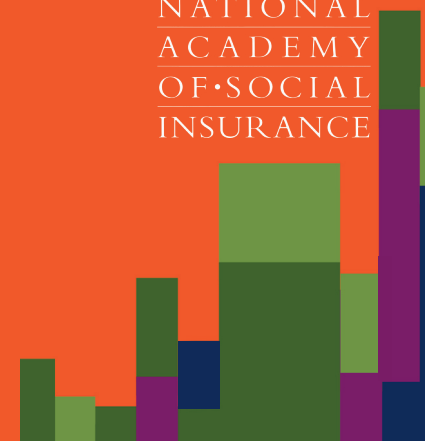




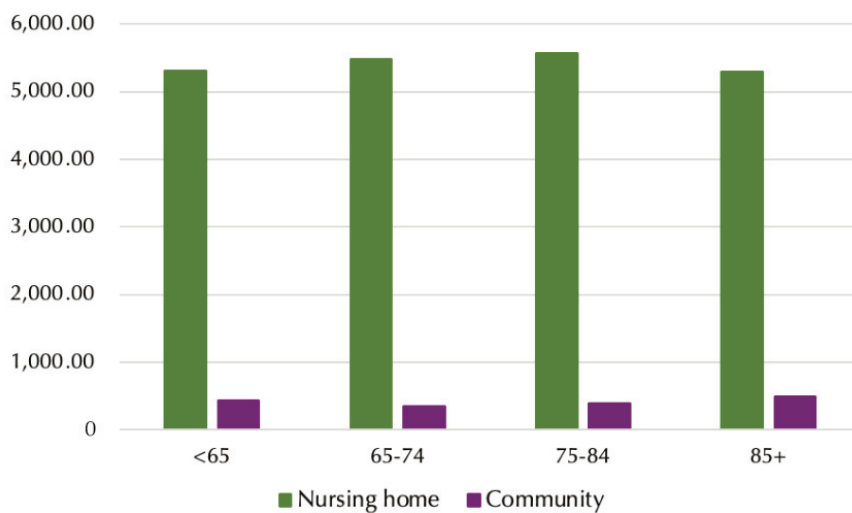
Nursing Facilities and the COVID-19 Pandemic



The COVID-19 pandemic took a significant toll on the health and well-being of older Americans, particularly those living in nursing facilities. The pandemic led to a 1% increase in deaths among individuals over age 65 in both 2020 and 2021 compared to predictions based on 2019 rates.

Medicare beneficiaries living in nursing homes were 14 times more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than those living in the community.

Figure 4-12 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people, 2020



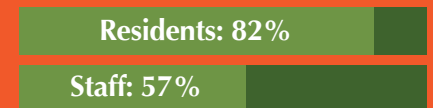
Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (n.d.).

COVID-19 deaths fell sharply after vaccine rollout, but there were disparities in vaccination rates. As of July 2021, 82% of residents and only 57% of nursing home staff were fully vaccinated. Increased risk of COVID-19 infection and unprecedented stress among nursing home staff were both factors in driving the current staffing shortages occurring in 24% of facilities nationally. Private nursing homes saw a 16% decline in staff, in spite of the fact that there was only a 10% decline in residents.

Black, Hispanic, and Native American Medicare beneficiaries in nursing homes also experienced higher COVID-19 case rates than White or Asian / Pacific Islander beneficiaries, suggesting that there are racial disparities in quality of care and facility oversight.

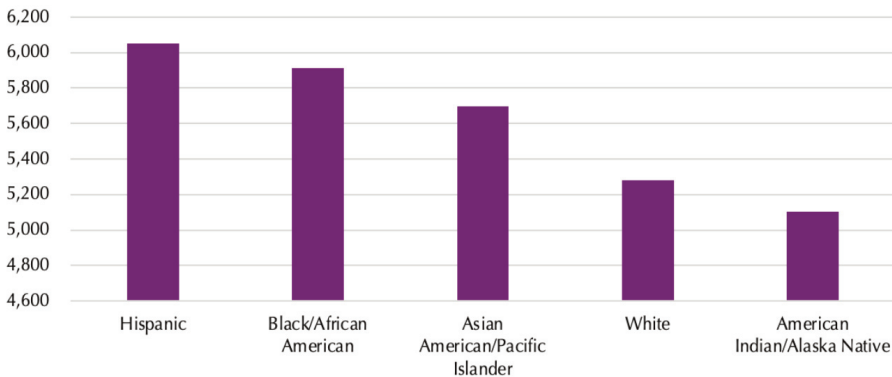
COVID-19 deaths fell sharply after vaccine rollout, but there were disparities in vaccination rates.

July 2021 Full Vaccinations at Nursing Homes



Black, Hispanic, and Native American Medicare beneficiaries in nursing homes experienced higher COVID-19 case rates than White or Asian / Pacific Islander beneficiaries, suggesting racial disparities in quality of care and facility oversight.

Figure 4-14 COVID-19 cases per 100K Medicare beneficiaries residing in nursing homes, March-December 2020



Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (n.d.).

These alarming outcomes for nursing home residents put a spotlight on the need for parity of, if not increased, Medicaid funding and coverage for home-based vs. institutional care. Additionally, the devastating impact of the pandemic specifically on individuals in residential facilities underscores the urgent need for better quality monitoring and enforcement of accountability at these nursing facilities.

Lessons Learned and Policy Options

1. Congress could consider adopting reforms that would increase nursing home staffing, improve pay and working conditions for nursing home staff, and increase the number of full-time jobs. [Option 4.E.1]
2. Congress might consider requiring nursing home workers to be vaccinated for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases like the flu. [Option 4.E.2]
3. Congress might consider expanding the Medicare Graduate Medical Education (GME) programs to include nurse training. [Option 4.E.3]

Alarming outcomes for nursing home residents put a spotlight on the need for parity of, if not increased, Medicaid funding and coverage for home-based vs. institutional care.

The devastating impact of the pandemic specifically on individuals in residential facilities underscores the urgent need for better quality monitoring and enforcement of accountability at these nursing facilities.

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The content of this Toolkit is drawn from the National Academy of Social Insurance Report of the COVID-19 Task Force Policy Translation Working Group, entitled *Social Insurance during the Pandemic: Successes, Shortcomings, and Policy Options for the Future*. The report is available at the Academy website: [NASI.org](https://www.nasi.org).