

MANHR IN THE NEWS: COVID-19

In addition to media quotes and TV/radio interviews with MANHR leadership below, MANHR provided research on COVID-19 and related issues to the following media outlets:

AARP National, Berkshire Eagle, Boston Globe, CambridgeDay.com, NPR, TIME Magazine, Wallstreet Journal, Washington Post, WCVB (Ch.5), WFXT Fox25, WGBH

1/14/21 Somerville Media Center (Cable TV): Invited by Sen. Patricia Jehlen, MA Elder Arr: Discussion on what has been happening to older adults living in nursing facilities (Arlene Germain, MANHR Policy Director) and in the community (Paul Hollings, Somerville Cambridge Elder Services ED).

Arlene discussed need to reopen nursing homes to visitations, since nursing home residents have suffered in many ways from isolation. Arlene also discussed how congregate living in nursing homes exacerbated the spread of COVID-19. Consequently, MA is eliminating 3 and 4 bed rooms by the end of 2021. She also made the case for moving to the Greenhouse model <https://www.thegreenhouseproject.org/> which uses only one bedroom/bathroom for each resident with the goal of 10 residents per Greenhouse.

12/26/20 Boston Globe: *Anxiety, relief - and confusion - as vaccines head to Massachusetts' hard-hit senior care sites* https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/12/25/metro/anxiety-relief-confusion-vaccines-head-massachusetts-hard-hit-senior-care-sites/?p1=HP_TrendingBar. In addition to concerns about side effects and the safety of the vaccine, a major effort to obtain consent forms is necessary --- 115,000 long-term-care residents and staff statewide need to be vaccinated, all of them requiring consent forms! Arlene's following comment focused on the need for family and others to help residents with vaccine decisions.

"...Senior advocates say hearing and cognitive limitations that are common among residents can make meaningful informed consent challenging, especially in the midst of so many restrictions on visitors due to the pandemic.

"The isolation long-term-care residents have suffered over the last nine months as a result of visitation restrictions makes it difficult for family or others to provide assistance that may be essential," said Arlene Germain, policy director for Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform..."

11/16/20 FOX25, 25 Investigates: *Second wave of COVID-19 crashing into Mass. nursing homes. Nursing home reform advocates call for more changes, Kerry Kavanaugh,* <https://www.boston25news.com/news/25-investigates/25-investigates-covid-19-patients-sent-struggling-nursing-homes-during-surge/OOYE5OAZO5AB7OEIJAE3P3NUM/>

"...State health officials are more ready than they were before," said Arlene Germain, another co-founder of Dignity Alliance Massachusetts. "However, I'm still concerned about the infection preventionist situation, which is the crux of the whole issue."

It was only in August that the DPH surveys began enforcing the federal requirement that each home have an infection preventionist on staff.

And, Germain says it's not easy for the public to determine how many and which homes are complying.

"It's like the house is on fire then you call the fire prevention team to come and say what should you've done," Lanzikos said..."

"...[Advocates] don't believe the solution to outbreaks is cutting people off from their loved ones on the outside, which frequently happens when a facility is working to control spread.

"Closing off these buildings and not knowing how the residents are really doing," Germain said.

"Separating them from their family, from their loved ones is an extra burden that just shouldn't happen..."

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10/1/20 BostonGlobe: *Is Massachusetts ready for a second wave of COVID-19?* Felice J. Freyer, Kay Lazar <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/01/metro/is-massachusetts-ready-second-wave-covid-19/>.

“...But advocates for nursing home residents say the regulations aren’t stringent enough and question whether the state’s health department, which has a [long history of weak enforcement](#), will aggressively monitor facilities.

“We really have to hold our breath that they did learn their lesson,” said Arlene Germain, policy director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform...”

9/2/20 Worcester Telegram: *Local nursing homes brace for new wave of virus* --- Elaine Thompson

<https://www.telegram.com/news/20200906/local-nursing-homes-brace-for-new-wave-of-virus>

“...Alison Weingartner, executive director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Homes, said she still has concerns about the safety of nursing home residents. One of her main concerns is the state designating wings of some nursing homes — including many that were poor-performing — as isolation space for COVID-19 patients brought there from hospitals.

As an incentive, the state paid the nursing homes, not only for the COVID-19 positive patients they took in, but also provided additional funding toward the care of all the other patients in that nursing home.

Weingartner said one of the nursing homes had been designated “special focus facilities” by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which meant they were “among the worst of the worst.”

Weingartner’s group complained when Beaumont in Worcester was designated a COVID-19 recovery center and relocated regular residents so it could take in COVID-19 patients from hospitals. The relocation plan was abandoned after some of the patients being moved were found to have the coronavirus.

“I have concerns,” Weingartner said. “If we have a surge, how does that affect these isolation homes that still exist today when we still haven’t sorted through the fact that some are low-care providers ... and how they affect residents already living in the nursing home?” ...”

8/11/20 WFXT FOX25: *25 Investigates: MA took step to shut down nursing home it used for COVID-19 patients just months ago* --- Kerry Kavanaugh, <https://www.boston25news.com/news/25-investigates/25-investigates-ma-took-step-shut-down-nursing-home-it-used-covid-19-patients-just-months-ago/WZFHKUYOPVHFPOIOPY2FGVITOA/>

“This week, Massachusetts [took a first step](#) toward shutting down a nursing home that, just four months ago, it was using for COVID-19 positive patients. 25 Investigates recently reported how some struggling long-term care facilities were part of the state’s pandemic response plan, as coronavirus cases surged in the spring...

...“We should not continually impact nursing homes with these patients,” said Arlene Germain is the policy director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform, which has demanded for months the state stop sending sick COVID-19 patients into nursing homes. “And as we know, elders are very susceptible to any disease, and especially it turns out to COVID.” ...
...In a news release, MassHealth said the homes had “a historic record of poor performance.”
“It tells me that one hand doesn’t know what the other hand is doing,” said Germain...”

8/4/20 WGBH Morning Addition – [Transcript not available]: Alison Weingartner quoted on MassHealth termination notices to three facilities: Town and Country in Lowell, Hermitage Healthcare in Worcester, and Wareham Healthcare in Wareham.

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7/16/20 WFXT FOX25: *COVID-19 patients sent to struggling nursing homes during surge ---* Kerry Kavanaugh, Jason Solowski, and Patricia Alulema <https://www.boston25news.com/news/25-investigates/25-investigates-covid-19-patients-sent-struggling-nursing-homes-during-surge/OOYE5OAZO5AB7OEIJEAE3P3NUM/>

At the end of March, state health officials needed a plan to preserve capacity levels at hospitals. That's when they turned to nursing homes. "They were part of the backup plan," said Arlene Germain, Policy Director with the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. "But I don't know why they were part of the backup plan. It's just common sense that you don't commingle COVID patients with such vulnerable nursing homes residents."

...For months, Germain's group has been questioning the state's plan to put coronavirus positive patients in facilities with "most vulnerable to this deadly disease."

...25 Investigates has learned pretty much [any nursing home was eligible](#) and they received financial incentives.

Facilities only needed to fill out an attestation form, stating they have a COVID-19 isolation space - either a floor, wing or room - and that they had the capacity to accept new residents. In exchange, the state freed up [millions in additional funding for homes](#).

"So the question is, what kind of vetting really did happen?" added Germain.

...We also found some homes on the state's list had been flagged by federal auditors for a variety of issues including poor staffing, poor plans for controlling the spread of infectious disease and some even had a history of abuse.

"Bringing in even more patients was just creating an additional burden [for nursing homes] that wasn't necessary," said Germain. "We should really take a hard look at these isolation units and not keep perpetuating them," said Germain. "It's not worth the risk. It's not worth their lives. It's not worth the lives of their health care workers."

6/16/20 Berkshire Eagle: *In nursing homes, heartbreak as some are more isolated than others --* - Heather Bellow <https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/in-nursing-homes-heartbreak-as-some-are-more-isolated-than-others,607177?>

"There are people who come every day to feed their loved one, like a spouse or a daughter," said Alison Weingartner, executive director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform, a nonprofit industry watchdog. "When those people were not allowed to see their person for weeks, they stopped eating. They do know that you're there."

Weingartner says the nonprofit receives numerous calls on their 800 numbers about this and the inability of those with dementia to communicate with technology.

Many nursing homes in the Berkshires and beyond solved the visitation problem by accessing state grants for multiple smart tablets to make it easier for videoconferencing.

"That was a solution," Weingartner said. "It didn't help those without cognition."

6/4/20 Washington Post: *Hundreds of nursing homes ran short on staff, protective gear as more than 30,000 residents died during pandemic ---* Peter Whoriskey, Debbie Cenziper, Will Englund, & Joel Jacobs

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/nursing-homes-coronavirus-deaths/>

The CMS should have held nursing homes accountable for lapses in infection control and prevention long before the pandemic, said Arlene Germain, policy director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. Even as the coronavirus spread in March and April, nearly 600 nursing homes were cited by government inspectors for violating federal standards meant to prevent and control the spread of infections.

She said the deaths of ~~more than 600~~ [typo in article] nursing home residents and staff members could have been mitigated if homes were better prepared and had access to supplies and testing. "It's heartbreaking," she said of the death count. "It shouldn't have happened."

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6/4/20 Politico: *States prod nursing homes to take more Covid-19 patients* – Maggie Severns & Rachel Rouben <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/04/states-nursing-homes-coronavirus-302134>
“...But half of the Massachusetts nursing homes that have created dedicated wings for Covid-19 patients are either rated “below average” or “much below average” – two-star or one-star -- on the federal scale, according to a review by the advocacy group Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. And one had been designated “special focus facilities” by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which put them among the 88 worst nursing homes in the country, the group found...”

6/3/20 WGBH Morning Edition, Christopher Burrell [Transcript not available]: Alison Weingartner quoted on restarting nursing home visitations: “They'd be a welcome relief, obviously, mentally for the family members and the resident. But do they bring another threat in because we're doing it too prematurely? And they've been out, out and about and now they're going to go visit their loved one in a facility. It is premature to have opened up visitations right now.”

5/28/20 WBZ-TV – State Data: Over 4,000 People Died Of Coronavirus In Massachusetts Nursing Homes --- Christina Hager <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2020/05/28/coronavirus-state-data-4000-people-died-massachusetts-nursing-homes/>

On Thursday, Massachusetts residents got a first look at the toll the coronavirus pandemic has taken on Massachusetts nursing homes. So far, 4,041 people have died at elderly care facilities across the state. More than 80 nursing homes have had 20 or more deaths.

The Department of Public Health released a database showing how many people have died at each facility, after advocates begged for the numbers.

“Wow, I had no idea the extent. This is information we’ve been looking for two months,” said Alison Weingartner, executive director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. “It’s too little too late. We still need more information to understand the extent of the problem because they still haven’t broken down the numbers between residents and staff.”

5/14/20 TIME Magazine - MANHR provided data: A License for Neglect. ' Nursing Homes Are Seeking — and Winning — Immunity Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic --- Abigail Abrams <https://time.com/5835228/nursing-homes-legal-immunity-coronavirus/>

5/11/20 WFXT FOX25: State’s official COVID-19 death toll at nursing homes may not tell full story inside some facilities --- Kerry Kavanaugh

<https://www.boston25news.com/rss-snd/25-investigates-states-official-covid-19-death-toll-nursing-homes-may-not-tell-full-story-inside-some-facilities/ZAUAJIRMJFAEVA6E3XTKFWELJ4/>

“It's so tragic and it's so infuriating all in the same breath,” said Arlene Germain, policy director for Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform.

"It was known from the onset, that this population was in the age range, and of the frailty that would be most susceptible. Plus, they live in such close proximity. So it was a recipe for disaster."

5/9/20 Boston Globe: State elder affairs office shelved citizens advisory council before coronavirus crisis, Panel offered feedback on conditions in Massachusetts nursing homes --- Robert Weisman

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/08/nation/state-elder-affairs-office-shelved-citizens-advisory-council-before-coronavirus-crisis/>

Another member of the citizens advisory council, Arlene Germain, policy director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform, said members had asked state officials in recent calls to add a consumer voice to a state task force that included representatives from

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nursing home operators and unions seeking higher MassHealth reimbursement. Some have blamed inadequate reimbursement rates for the low pay and chronic staff shortages at facilities even before the pandemic.

“The council would have had value right now,” Germain said. “It could be an overall umbrella of expertise from people who have been in the field for decades that could help in coordinating the state response to the coronavirus.”

5/6/20 WGBH Morning Edition, Christopher Burrell (Transcript not available): Alison Weingartner, Executive Director, interviewed about Courtyard Nursing Care Center in Medford --- 54 residents have died among 117 positive cases and 42 staff members infected.

May, 2020 [www.HillCountryObserver.com](http://www.hillcountryobserver.com) (Berkshire County, MA; Eastern NY; Southwestern VT): **The Threat To Our Elders**, Testing, transparency at issue as virus sweeps through region’s nursing homes --- Tracy Frisch <http://www.hillcountryobserver.com/2020news/may2020index.htm>
Alison Weingartner, the advocacy group’s executive director, said Massachusetts was not reporting Covid-19 cases by nursing home until new federal rules required facilities to begin reporting that data.

“We need some transparency,” Weingartner said. “There hasn’t been any until it was forced.” On April 20, the state announced that long-term care facilities would have to begin reporting Covid-19 cases. By the end of April, state figures revealed long-term care facilities accounted for more than half the documented cases in the state – and nearly 60 percent of the deaths. In addition, two-thirds of the nursing facilities across the state had at least one Covid-19 case...
...Weingartner said the controversy surrounding the state’s handling of Covid-19 patients has helped to focus public attention on the conditions in nursing homes.

“What it has done is shine a light on how the nursing home industry is understaffed, underpaid, overwhelmed and not controlling infections,” Weingartner said. “Prior to the pandemic, in a three-year period, two-thirds of all nursing homes were cited for their infection control practices. People don’t understand how bad it is. Now that the light has been shone on these inadequacies, what we as advocates hope is that they’ll finally be addressed in a comprehensive way.”

4/20/20 WGBH State Watchdogs Have Been Banned From Nursing Homes, Along With All Visitors

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2020/04/20/state-watchdogs-have-been-banned-from-nursing-homes-along-with-all-visitors>

Elder advocates and watchdog groups don’t question the rationale to curb infection, but they say the lack of oversight could undermine the care of these elders at a critical time, as nursing homes are becoming hot spots for infections.

“There’s not as many eyes looking at them,” said Alison Weingartner, executive director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. “If you don’t have the family members, you don’t have the ombudsmen coming in to see them, there’s a potential for neglect that won’t be witnessed by anybody else.”

Elder advocates and watchdogs like Weingartner said nursing home operators have not earned that trust. They pointed to government inspections over the last three years that found more than two-thirds of nursing homes in the state violated infection control standards.

Weingartner said that barring family members and ombudsmen increases the need for transparency from all the elder-housing facilities in the state through daily COVID-19 reports. State lawmakers are now pushing for legislation to make that happen.

4/20/20 WGBH Morning Edition, Christopher Burrell (Transcript not available): Alison Weingartner, Executive Director, interviewed.

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4/14/20 WCVB-Ch.5: *Two-thirds of Massachusetts nursing homes cited for infection control problems* --- Kathy Curan

<https://www.wcvb.com/article/two-thirds-of-massachusetts-nursing-homes-cited-for-infection-control-problems/32148434>

Infection control-something that facilities across the country struggle with- is critical in preventing the spread of this virus, said Arlene Germain with the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform

"We're in a pandemic where it becomes even 100 times more serious and more needed. So, yes, the infection control is primary," Germain said.

"Nursing home residents are really just so vulnerable to begin with that this is just decimating," she said.

4/11/20 Cambridge Day: *Testing for nursing home coronavirus infections shows 24 cases, filling in blanks from early April* --- Sue Reinert

<http://www.cambridgeday.com/2020/04/11/testing-for-nursing-home-coronavirus-infections-shows-24-cases-filling-in-blanks-from-early-april/>

Families of nursing home residents have complained of not being able to find out the situation at their loved ones' homes from the state or the nursing homes. "The transparency has been unbelievable – there isn't any," said Alison Weingartner, executive director of Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. The organization opposes clearing out some nursing homes to make room for Covid-19 patients leaving hospitals but still needing care.

4/9/20 Boston Globe: *Before coronavirus, 2 out of 3 Mass. nursing homes broke the rules for preventing outbreaks* --- Matt Rocheleau & Robert Weisman

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/09/nation/before-coronavirus-2-3-mass-nursing-homes-broke-rules-preventing-infectious-outbreaks/>

But with nursing homes now turning away visitors, Alison Weingartner, executive director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform, said she worried about a lack of accountability.

"There's less eyes on them," she said. "Now that family members can't get in, that's exacerbated the problem and the ombudsmen can't get in, either — so who is watching them?"

4/8/20 Boston Globe – MANHR collaborated: Letter to Editor (MANHR & Paul Lanzikos*-leads, 16 co-signers): *The most vulnerable among us, made even more so*

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/08/opinion/most-vulnerable-among-us-made-even-more-so/>

4/4/20 Boston Globe: *Plan to turn nursing homes into COVID-19 recovery sites stirs anxiety* --- Laura Crimaldi.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/04/metro/plan-turn-nursing-homes-into-covid-19-recovery-sites-stirs-anxiety/>

Some advocates have pressed Baker to abandon the nursing home plan and consider using dormitories, hotel rooms, and recently closed facilities to house recovering COVID-19 patients.

"While well intentioned, the experience, now temporarily halted, with the first two facilities in Worcester and Wilmington clearly demonstrates the risks involved with dislocating frail, vulnerable nursing home residents," said a statement from leaders at three organizations that advocate for elderly and Paul J. Lanzikos, the state's secretary for elder affairs in the 1980s.

Continued

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4/3/20 Boston Globe: *51 residents positive for coronavirus at Wilmington nursing home, despite having no symptoms* --- Jeremy C. Fox.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/03/metro/51-residents-positive-coronavirus-wilmington-nursing-home-despite-having-no-symptoms/?p1=BGSearch> [Advanced Results](#)

Four groups that advocate for nursing home residents have opposed Baker's plan, including Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. Arlene Germain, the organization's policy director, said the 51 cases at AdviniaCare show the dangers that seniors face.

"That age group is most at risk and they're already vulnerable — that's why they're in a nursing home. This will go through like wildfire," Germain said, adding later, "We are pushing very hard to keep them in place and have asked the state to look elsewhere for these 1,000 rooms."

4/2/20 Salem News: *Advocates raise alarm on nursing home transfers* --- Paul Leighton

https://www.salemnews.com/news/local_news/advocates-raise-alarm-on-nursing-home-transfers/article_0ba62120-3819-5f3e-a270-17f7332aa39d.html The Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform is also opposing the transfers. The organization, along with other advocates, wrote a letter to state Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders saying the plan "puts nursing home residents in great and unnecessary jeopardy."

4/1/20 Boston Globe: *Anticipating surge, Boston area facilities moving residents and patients to set up coronavirus recovery centers* [4/2/20 Boston Globe: *Patients move for recovery center* ---

"Nursing home advocates decry push to move patients"] --- Robert Weisman.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/01/nation/wilmington-nursing-home-moving-residents-out-create-virus-recovery-center/>

"It's a nightmare," said Arlene Germain, policy director of the Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform. "It's like an eviction. I don't see the need. There are so many options in Massachusetts with dormitories, athletic fields and empty nursing homes. It's a recipe for disaster."

3/30/20 Boston Fox25 News: MANHR Policy Director interviewed live: *Relocating nursing home residents comes with lot of risks advocates warn* --- Julianne Lima

https://www.boston25news.com/news/health/relocating-nursing-home-residents-comes-with-lot-risks-advocates-warn/IGZ2A2D325DUHDAXDL5HCXSJUU/?_website=cmg-tv-10020.

Meanwhile, there are concerns about a letter from Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary MaryLou Sudders asking for skilled nursing facilities to volunteer to relocate all of their residents in order to make room to treat coronavirus patients.

"Nursing home residents are one of the most vulnerable populations at risk for the virus, and we believe they should be sheltered in place rather than being moved," said Arlene Germain, policy director for Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform.

Worcester nursing home Beaumont was the first to volunteer and [residents moved out on Saturday](#).

"I was shocked, it was so quick and done so against whatever regulations are already in place," said Germain.

Advocates say relocating comes with a lot of risks to residents. Some are asking the state to consider other options.

"There are some facilities that are already empty, that have already closed, maybe they can reopen," said Germain.

The Massachusetts Advocates for Nursing Home Reform are currently writing a letter to send to state leaders asking them to stop the relocations and reconsider other options.

3/12/20 WGBH Morning Edition, Christopher Burrell (Transcript not available): Alison Weingartner, Executive Director, interviewed.