

# COVID-19 is the disruptive moment the older adult care industry has been waiting for

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Kejia Hu. Credit: Owen Graduate School of Management

Kejia Hu, assistant professor of operations management, worked with two researchers investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply and demand in long-term older adult care operations. The comprehensive review is the first study of its kind, including interviews with leaders of care organizations, a review of 10-K financial disclosure reports from public care organizations and an examination of published industry articles and media reports.

By looking into what changed and what did not about older adult care as a result of COVID-19, the researchers developed a real-time perspective that can identify new opportunities for long-term older adult care in a post-[pandemic](#) world.

## Why it matters

The COVID-19 pandemic may signal a unique period of disruption that can spark reform in the older adult care industry and ultimately improve the quality of life for those receiving care.

"Our results indicate that during the pandemic, a trend toward de-institutional care options intensified, which was confirmed by caregiving institutions with lower occupancy after the pandemic's outbreak," Hu said. "The research highlights key areas where reform may lead to better [service](#) models, expanded service offerings in care settings, new payment structures and promotion of innovations in the field."

The use of innovative telehealth and digital communication tools was widely expanded during the pandemic, Hu said, which may open up new possibilities for [older adults](#), industry practitioners and policymakers.

Reform to the elder care industry will be crucial as the American population ages and demands improved care and more widely available health services. Today there are [more than 46 million adults age 65 and older](#) living in the U.S.; by 2050 that number is expected to grow to almost 90 million. Between 2020 and 2030 alone, the time the last of the baby boom cohorts reaches age 65, the number of older adults is projected to increase by almost 18 million.

## What's next

Hu's research offers immediate suggestions and directives for improving daily operations to older adult care during the pandemic. In the longer term, the work will help reshape how older adults receive care in a post-pandemic world.

"By learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, this research sheds light on the older adult care industry reform," Hu said. "Topics including service offerings, service innovations and older adult decision-making are worth exploring."

**More information:** Lu Kong et al, Caring for an Aging Population in a Post-Pandemic World: Emerging Trends in the U.S. Older Adult Care Industry, *Service Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1287/serv.2021.0280](https://doi.org/10.1287/serv.2021.0280)

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