Payment for Prisoner Health Care Treatment

Iowa hospitals are routinely asked to deliver health care services to incarcerated individuals or those in custody of law enforcement. These individuals often require specialized care that can only be delivered in a hospital setting; however, all too often those in custody have no health insurance or financial means to pay for care. In these instances, the county, city, or state (depending on jurisdiction) should reimburse hospitals for the care provided, and failure to do so adds to the charity care burden that ultimately impacts overall health system costs in Iowa. Recently, hospitals have been experiencing greater resistance from jails/prisons to accept this financial responsibility, which has led to litigation to try to resolve questions of financial responsibility. Hospitals providing medical care for prisoners should be compensated for the care they provide and should not be responsible for pursuing payment from prisoners or third parties which can be time consuming and costly.

*The General Assembly should clarify that the facility/jurisdiction that has custody of the individual (whether that be a city, county, or state facility) shall reimburse the hospital for services provided.*

IHA supports the following principles:

- Hospitals should not be financially responsible for the payment of medical services provided to prisoners and/or those in law enforcement’s custody.
- Hospitals will provide the same level of care to all patients, regardless of whether they are in law enforcement or jail custody.
- Hospitals will follow their normal billing procedures when treating prisoners or people in custody of law enforcement.
- Hospitals should attempt to contract regarding the provision of medical services to prisoners with their local jails and law enforcement. Experience has shown, hospitals with these contractual arrangements are consistently paid a negotiated rate when serving this population.
- Hospitals do not support “patient dumping” by law enforcement and will, at all times, follow state and federal law regarding patient confidentiality.