

IOWA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

BACKGROUND

Over the past several months, hospitals have been true testaments to their missions to serve. They have demonstrated the vital importance of access to health care. They have served as safe havens, providing vital care to patients and communities affected by COVID-19. Hospital employees have put their lives on the line to ensure care for their patients and placed their communities' needs before theirs. Now more than ever, Iowa hospitals need help. Iowans, regardless of where they live, need access to health care and vital services. The Legislature needs to support hospitals to ensure they always will be there for Iowa communities.

TELEHEALTH

The Legislature should pass payment parity for providers regardless of where the patient is located. There has always been a need to develop telehealth in Iowa, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the urgency of this need. State and federal governments have temporarily lifted the heavy regulatory burdens on telehealth, paving the way for Iowans to receive care in settings other than hospitals and clinics. Recent changes also mean that private insurers are paying for telehealth at the same rate as if they provided their services in-person *regardless of where the patient is located*. This has allowed patients and providers to use telehealth in ways not possible before and has made a significant difference in access to care.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The Iowa General Assembly should allow counties to declare EMS an essential service without special elections and end the five-year sunset on such declarations. Instead of creating a one-size-fits-all policy, this gives counties the local control to determine their needs and create sustainable funding mechanisms without relying on the general assembly for an appropriation.

FISCAL RELIEF

The Legislature should pass policies that help hospitals sustain access to care statewide by providing reimbursement and relief funds help address the pandemic.

These policies include:

- **Establishing a hospital-relief trust fund.** The general assembly should create a \$150 million trust fund for distressed hospitals to access to sustain operations during emergencies.
- **Increasing reimbursement for hospitals.** The cost-adjustment factor for critical access hospitals should be increased from \$1.5 million to \$6.5 million. With a federal match, this will generate \$17 million to Iowa's critical access hospitals. The Legislature also should increase rates to urban prospective payment systems hospitals to ensure fiscal viability of large hospitals that cannot benefit from the cost-adjustment factor.

HOSPITAL TRUSTEE ELECTIONS

The Legislature should restore the filing deadline for the affidavit of candidacy for hospital trustees to not less than 69 days before the general election. Up to 2019, county hospital trustees always filed an affidavit of candidacy not less than 69 days before a general election. This meant affidavits were due around August. Legislation passed in 2019 moved the filing deadline from August to March. The August deadline was restored for the 2020 election cycle. This filing deadline should be restored permanently.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The Legislature should identify and appropriate sustainable funding for behavioral health services for adults and children in Iowa. The Legislature has passed legislation to increase access to behavioral health supports and services for all Iowans but, unfortunately, funding has not been allocated to support these important policies. Sustainable funding and support of these programs and services is vital to the creation of a mental health system in Iowa.

WORKFORCE

The Legislature should support and expand programs that help recruit and retain health care professionals in Iowa. Hospitals statewide face health care workforce shortages. Hospitals are struggling to recruit, hire and retain medical professionals in nearly every category. Iowa should work to ensure hospitals have the resources to pay competitive wages and attract quality candidates.

TORT REFORM

The general assembly should place a hard cap on noneconomic damages in medical malpractice liability cases. Doing so will ensure that Iowa's providers are not subject to subjective damages, keep medical malpractice liability insurance premiums from increasing and ensure that Iowa hospitals can continue to recruit highly qualified providers to Iowa.

CERTIFICATE OF NEED

The Legislature should maintain the certificate-of-need process to ensure that Iowa's health care system remains sustainable and efficient. The certificate-of-need process is vital to ensuring access to high-quality care in Iowa. Iowa is among 35 states that require a process to plan for the development of institutional health care services through this process. States that have abandoned certificate-of-need laws have experienced a surge in profit-based service lines that jeopardize the sustainability of community hospitals.