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May 21, 2021

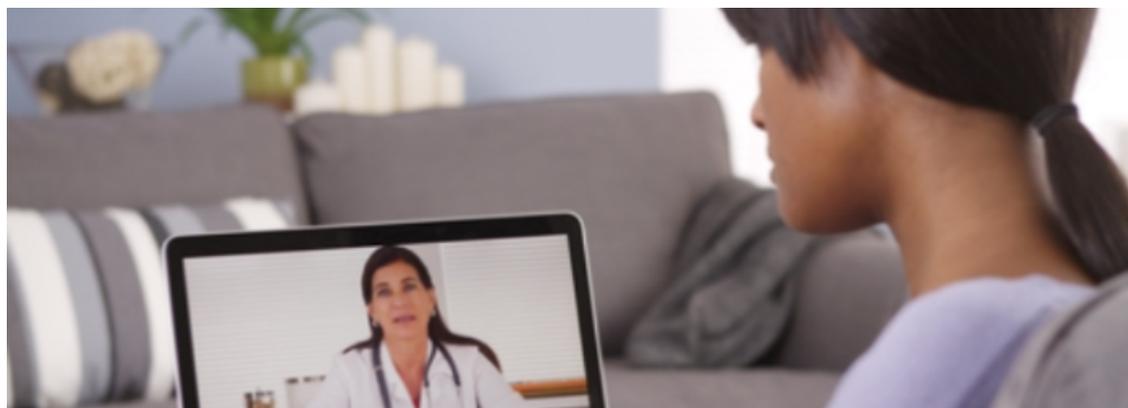
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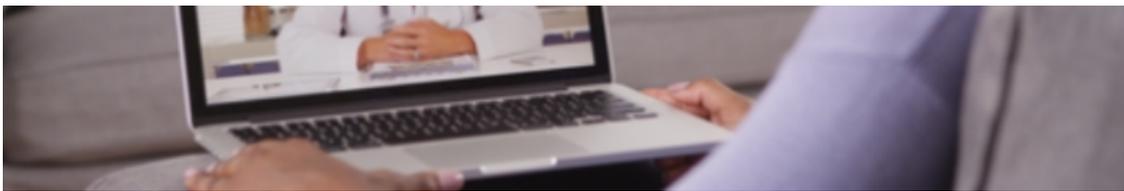
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Legislative session ends during week 19

Shortly before midnight Wednesday, legislators in both chambers adjourned for the final time this legislative session. Lawmakers spent their final week debating bills late into the night, hoping to get their work finished. The Iowa Hospital Association is pleased to announce that most hospital priorities were approved and sent to the governor's office. The Iowa Hospital Association is very thankful for hospital advocates and champions in the Legislature who made this happen.

[Click here](#) for a video overview of the final days of session and watch for the 2021 Iowa Hospital Association Legislative Summary, which will be released following a final review of bills by Gov. Reynolds.





Telehealth payment parity for mental health goes to the governor

After several months of vigorous advocacy on telehealth at the Capitol, the Senate in a late-night debate Monday passed [Senate File 619](#) – the governor’s compromise tax bill, which contained telehealth payment parity for mental health. This is a huge win for mental health in Iowa. The bill also shifts mental health funding from counties to the state appropriations as a way to stabilize and provide equal funding for mental health statewide. The house also passed the bill. This is a significant achievement this session when just weeks ago the Senate refused to give telehealth a subcommittee.

The Iowa Hospital Association thanks Gov. Reynolds and Sen. Dan Dawson for their work in getting telehealth into this legislation. Thank you also to hospital and health system CEOs for their grassroots efforts in reaching out to senators in the final days of session. Thank you, advocates!

EMS and public hospital trustee elections included in final bills debated

For the last few weeks, the Iowa Hospital Association reported cautious optimism about two pieces of legislation and told hospitals the bills could come down to the wire. This could not have been more correct. Legislation containing provisions including public hospital trustee elections and easing the process for emergency medical services to be declared an essential service were among the last bills debated before the Legislature’s final adjournment.

[Senate File 568](#) was a large elections bills that made technical corrections to the election process. The bill included a section that returned the deadline for public hospital trustee candidates to submit their campaign paperwork to 69 days before the general election. Legislation in 2019 had moved the deadline up to spring. The Iowa Hospital Association successfully advocated a temporary fix for the 2020 election, and it was a priority to return the deadline to the fall. The Iowa Hospital Association is grateful for the work done to make this happen and would like to especially thank Sen. Roby Smith and Rep. Bobby Kaufmann.

The other 11th hour issue eases the process for EMS to be declared an essential service. As a reminder, legislation for this was introduced and passed unanimously in the House early in this session. The bill then spent several weeks in the Senate with no movement. This week, similar bill language was proposed as an amendment to the annual standings legislation, [Senate File 615](#).

The amendment updates the process by:

- Allowing counties and county and city EMS districts to declare EMS an essential service through a vote of the people but without a lengthy petition process.
- Allowing these entities to draw down tax levies through property tax or local income surtax if approved by the vote of the people.
- Establishing a district advisory council to help implement and assess EMS service operations..
- Setting a sunset of the declaration at 15 years for those counties that are not the 11 most-populous counties and 10 years for the most-populous counties.

Finally, the amendment gives Iowa hospitals and medical-care ambulance or nontransport services the ability to provide certification for EMS care providers. The Iowa Hospital Association knows that much work went into having this language included in SF 615 and would like to give a special thanks to Reps. Bobby Kaufmann, Lee Hein and Phil Thompson, and Sens. Tim Kraayenbrink, Roby Smith and Mike Klimesh. The Iowa Hospital Association also would like to recognize and thank the hospital CEOs who reached out persistently about this issue. These CEOs include James Roetman from Pocahontas Community Hospital and Lisa Radtke from Winneshiek Medical Center.

Budget bill provides health care funding

The House and Human Services budget was one of the first budgets to pass through both chambers this session. This is not typically the case. The budget bill contains several appropriations for health care including:

- Maintaining the cost-adjustment factor for critical access hospitals at its current rate.
- Extending the hospital assessment for two years with status quo funding.
- Adding \$425,000 for the governor's Centers of Excellence program.

There also was an increase of \$44.2 million for the Medicaid program. This includes:

- \$19,080,860 for nursing facility reimbursement rates.
- \$11,002,240 for home and community-based services provider rates.
- \$7,134,214 for home-based habilitation provider rates.
- \$3,900,000 for Psychiatric Medical Institutions for Children provider rates.
- \$2,000,000 for home health provider rates.

In addition, the bill included an increase of \$200,000 for rural psychiatric residency programs and an increase of \$100,000 for medical residency matching programs. Both chambers quickly approved the budget this session.

The Iowa Hospital Association would like to thank Sen. Mark Costello and Rep. Joel Fry for their work on the budget this session.



Workforce wins

There were several wins this session in workforce for hospitals, including expansion of the Rural Primary Care Loan Repayment Program, [Senate File 129](#), which added OB-GYN as eligible for loan repayment and addressed distance requirements. This bill was signed by the governor, and the program also received more than \$1.7 million in appropriations for the next fiscal year.

The governor also signed [House File 196](#) into law. This bill expands the Health Care Professional Recruitment Program. This program also received appropriations of \$400,973 this year. The health care loan repayment program received \$250,000.

Two bills that fell short were Tort for Graduate Medical Residents, [House File 852](#), and Dental and Medical Admissions at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine and dental school, [House File 468](#). These issues will likely resurface next session. The Iowa Hospital Association will form workgroup in the interim to discuss workforce issues. Watch for more information about this workgroup. A special thank you to Reps. Ann Meyer and Jacob Bossman for their efforts on workforce issues this session.

Tort reform dies on the debate calendar

In the final hours of the 2021 Legislative session, [House File 592](#) and [Senate File 557](#), which would have provided a \$1 million cap on noneconomic damages against a health care provider for personal injury or death, did not make it to debate. This will be priority legislation in 2022 as the Iowa Hospital Association continues to advocate for tort reform. Thank you to all of the CEOs who reached out to legislators about this issue.

Governor signs legislation addressing mask mandates

Near midnight on the final night of session, the governor signed House File 847 into law, which includes a prohibition of facial covering requirements for counties and cities. The Iowa Hospital Association has received several questions about the impact of this legislation on hospitals.

The Iowa Hospital Association has reviewed the legislation and determined that the new law **does not** impact policies at hospitals, including public hospitals. Hospitals can and should continue to adhere to CDC guidance and other applicable regulations about the use of face masks and other coverings.

Please reach out to [Jen Nutt](#) or [Kim Murphy](#) at IHA with questions or concerns.

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