

IOWA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

GENERAL OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

Over the past two years, 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.

Workforce

Across Iowa, hospitals are facing critical health care workforce shortages. Hospitals are struggling to recruit, hire and maintain medical professionals and staff in nearly every category. Iowa should make every effort to ensure hospitals have the resources they need, especially during this time of dire need and urgency. The General Assembly should continue to develop and fund programs that demonstrate improved recruitment and retention for medical professionals in Iowa. Areas of focus should include:

- **Expanding training** to increase rural access to education and increased incomes.
- **Increasing reimbursement to medical professionals** to ensure Iowa is a competitive state to recruit talented medical professionals.
- **Investing in initiatives** that bring medical professionals to Iowa to live, grow and work.
- **Reducing administrative barriers** that make hiring and retaining employees more difficult.

Hospital operations

Iowa's hospitals are vital to meeting the health care needs of the communities they serve. Hospitals are the only providers that can care for patients who seek emergency care, regardless of their ability to pay, provide continuous access to care and response to large-scale disasters and pandemics. Hospitals need the General Assembly's help to maintain operations. Needed legislation includes:

- **Tort reform:** The General Assembly should place a hard cap on noneconomic damages in medical malpractice liability cases. Medical malpractice liability affects Iowa's ability to recruit and retain physicians and nurses.
- **Rural emergency hospital designation:** The General Assembly should update the Iowa Code to include a licensing designation for rural emergency hospitals.
- **Vaccines:** The General Assembly should allow hospitals and health systems to make decisions to determine an appropriate clinical response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospitals and health systems should be allowed to adopt vaccination policies based on the unique factors and circumstances affecting their areas.

Hospital operations - cont'd

- **Certificate of need:** The General Assembly should maintain the certificate-of-need process to ensure Iowa's health care system remains sustainable and efficient. The certificate-of-need process is vital to ensuring access to quality care in Iowa.
- **Emergency medical services:** The General Assembly should invest in programs that help recruit and retain emergency medical services providers.

Fiscal

Many hospitals are struggling to maintain viability to provide the array of services needed in their communities. The future of Iowa's economy and health depends on its health care infrastructure. Policies to foster and grow that vital infrastructure include:

- **Critical access hospitals:** The General Assembly should continue to support the cost-adjustment factor and policies that help sustain critical access hospitals and the care they provide. The cost-adjustment factor 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.
- **Hospital reimbursement:** The General Assembly should support a "days awaiting placement" reimbursement. Care provided to patients while awaiting a placement is not reimbursed by insurers in Iowa. This results in hospitals absorbing extensive costs to care for patients while insurers determine appropriate placements.
- **Medicaid program:** The General Assembly should continue to support and advance policies that establish consistency and reduce administrative complexity in Iowa's Medicaid program.

Behavioral health

The General Assembly should ensure the development and growth of long-term services and community-based supports for Iowans in need of behavioral health care and focus on the development of a behavioral health workforce. Legislatively, Iowa needs:

- **Placement options for long-term care**, including intensive residential service homes, assertive community treatment teams and subacute care.
- **Home and community-based services**, such as access centers and mobile crisis response teams.
- **Increased workforce** in behavioral health.