

# IOWA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

## HOSPITAL OPERATIONS

### SUPPORTING IOWA HOSPITAL OPERATIONS

#### BACKGROUND

Iowa's hospitals are vital to meeting the health care needs of the communities they serve by providing a range of acute care and diagnostic services, supporting public health needs and offering many other community services, including financial assistance, to promote the health and well-being of their communities. Although some of these services also are delivered by other health care providers, what makes the role of hospitals unique are:

- Care for all patients who seek emergency care, regardless of their ability to pay.
- Continuous access to care.
- Preparation to care for victims of large-scale disasters and pandemics.

For nearly two years, Iowa hospitals have shown their unique abilities and the importance of having access to care in Iowa communities. Now more than ever, we need to support our community hospitals so they can continue to support and care for Iowans.

Specifically, the General Assembly should

- **Place a hard cap on noneconomic damages** in medical malpractice liability cases.
- **Update the Iowa Code** to include a licensing designation for rural emergency hospitals
- **Allow health care entities to make individual decisions** to determine an appropriate clinical response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccine to safeguard those they serve and employ.
- **Maintain the certificate-of-need process** to ensure Iowa's health care system remains sustainable and efficient.
- **Invest in programs that help recruit and retain** emergency medical services providers.

#### Tort reform

Medical malpractice liability affects Iowa's ability to recruit and retain physicians and nurses. Many states have hard caps on noneconomic damages, allowing practitioners and provider to pay less in malpractice premiums and ensure more funds are used to pay wages and provide community services. Doing so will ensure that Iowa's providers are not exposed to subjective damages, keep medical malpractice liability insurance premiums from increasing and help safeguard Iowa hospitals' abilities to recruit highly qualified providers to Iowa.

***The General Assembly should place a hard cap on noneconomic damages in medical malpractice liability cases.***

#### Rural emergency hospital designation

In December 2020, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. This legislation included a provision allowing for a rural emergency hospital designation. This designation would allow small and critical access hospitals to transition to providing emergency and outpatient care, but no inpatient services.

For Iowa hospitals to have the ability to transition to this designation, the state needs to develop licensing requirements and administrative rules establishing a rural emergency hospital designation in the Iowa Code.

***The Legislature should update the Iowa Code to include a licensing designation for rural emergency hospitals.***

## Vaccines

Vaccines are an essential component to providing comprehensive health care and protecting communities from various infectious diseases. Research has shown that, over the last 60 years, vaccines have eradicated once common diseases, such as smallpox, and are close to eradicating others, such as polio. Further, vaccines also prevent more than 2.5 million deaths each year.

Iowa's hospitals and health systems are committed to protecting the health and safety of the patients and communities they serve. As each community is different and has different needs, health care entities should be allowed to adopt vaccination policies based on the unique factors and circumstances affecting their areas.

***The Iowa Legislature should allow health care entities to make individual decisions to determine an appropriate clinical response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccine to safeguard those they serve and employ.***

## Certificate of need

The certificate-of-need process is vital to ensuring access to quality care in Iowa. Iowa is among 35 states that require a process to plan for the development of institutional health care services through a certificate of need. This process requires health care providers to demonstrate that a community need exists before establishing new facilities and services or purchasing expensive equipment. States that have abandoned certificate-of-need laws have experienced a surge in profit-based service lines that jeopardize the sustainability of community hospitals.

***The Legislature should maintain the certificate-of-need process to ensure Iowa's health care system remains sustainable and efficient.***

## Emergency medical services

Iowa hospitals were very grateful for the Iowa Legislature's work during the 2021 legislative session to ease the requirements for counties and local emergency medical services districts to declare EMS an essential service. The next step is to address workforce needs for EMS providers.

In some areas, paid ambulance services provide reliable care with most crews staffed at paramedic level. In other areas, volunteers have traditionally provided EMS. The current model in which volunteers have traditionally provided EMS no longer works for many Iowa communities with the cost of time required for certification and lack of flexibility in volunteers' work schedules. There are not enough volunteers to always staff calls and not enough paid staff to provide services. Emergency medical services need support to help recruit and train EMS providers.

***The Iowa General Assembly should invest in programs that help recruit and retain EMS providers.***