

Hospitals and health systems provide critical care to the patients and communities they serve, while maintaining an important presence as major employers and trusted organizations. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals faced unprecedented challenges, which have only been exacerbated by the public health emergency and current economic landscape.

As such, hospitals are contending with significant increases in costs of labor from workforce shortages, drugs, equipment, supplies, inflation, insufficient government reimbursement and a patient backlog of necessary-but-deferred medical care. Lawmakers need to hear and learn from their constituents about the challenges hospitals and health systems face and what is at stake in terms of access to care.

The campaign trail leading up to the 2022 mid-term elections in November is a unique opportunity to share hospitals' and health systems' stories, reiterate their commitment to care for patients, and engage lawmakers on critical issues that will have a significant impact on the sustainability of the local health care system.

The following are sample questions and background information that you can use when attending town halls or having discussions with candidates on the campaign trail.

Ensuring Hospital and Health System Financial Stability and Protecting Patients' Access to Care and Coverage

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of America's hospitals and health systems and the front-line caregivers who continue to care for patients and protect communities. Before, during and after the pandemic's peak, hospitals repeatedly confronted a range of financial and operational challenges, including historic volume and revenue losses, as well as skyrocketing expenses. When coupled with Medicare sequester cuts, looming Statutory PAYGO cuts, higher staffing costs, and historic rates of inflation, these increased expenses have been severely detrimental to hospital finances, leading to billions in losses and more than a third of the nation's hospitals operating on negative margins.

What actions have you taken to provide support for your hospitals and health systems during these uncertain times? What actions would you take in the future to ensure America has strong hospitals and health systems?

Strengthen & Support the Health Care Workforce

A talented, qualified, engaged and diverse workforce is at the heart of America's health care system. However, hospitals and health systems now face mounting and critical staffing shortages that could jeopardize access to care in the communities they serve. A 2021 Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that nearly 30% of health care workers are considering leaving their profession altogether, and nearly 60% reported impacts to their mental health stemming from their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising rates of physical violence and verbal abuse toward hospital staff is yet another challenge hospitals and health systems face to recruit and retain their workers. Not only does violence cause physical and psychological injury for health care workers, workplace violence and intimidation make it more difficult for nurses, doctors, and other clinical staff to provide quality patient care. The AHA supports the Safety from Violence for Healthcare Employees (SAVE) Act (H.R.7961), which is modeled after existing federal statute for the protection of aircraft and airport workers and would make it a federal crime to assault or intimidate a health care worker or other hospital employees.

Can you describe what legislative efforts you support to address the health care worker shortage and what you are doing to help protect health care workers from rising rates of verbal and physical abuse?

Consumer Health Plan Accountability

Certain health plan practices threaten patient access to care, contribute to clinician burnout and drive excessive administrative costs and burden in the health care system. AHA recently released a report highlighting numerous commercial health insurer policies that compromise patient safety and raise costs such as prior authorization requirements. Regulators should increase their oversight of health plans and implement a comprehensive simplification agenda, beginning with streamlining prior authorization requirements and processes, and monitoring for abusive payment delays and denials. The AHA supports the Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act of 2022 (H.R.8487/S.3018), legislation that seeks to address these concerns and protect patients' health by streamlining and simplifying prior authorization requirements.

Do you support Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act and other policies that can help ensure that medical professionals are the ones making key decisions in patient care rather than the insurance industry? Please describe any additional legislative proposals you support that seek to address these concerns.