

Hospitals and health systems provide critical care to the patients and communities they serve, while taking on important roles as major employers and trusted sources of information and economic stability. However, hospitals face mounting challenges, including severe workforce shortages, rising costs of care, inadequate government reimbursement and overwhelming regulatory burden. In addition, hospitals and health systems are facing unprecedented attacks from adversaries who do not understand the full value to patients and communities of hospitals and the 24/7 specialized care they provide. Lawmakers need to hear and learn from their constituents about the challenges hospitals and health systems face and their risk of losing access to care.

The issue of affordability, including health care affordability, is front and center this year and will be part of this year's congressional and administration discussions, as well as the mid-term elections.

The AHA continues to advocate for solutions to address affordability as we educate the public and policymakers about the underlying costs of caring that contribute to hospital prices. They include significantly rising drug costs and the role of some commercial health insurers' policies that delay, deny and disrupt care, as well as add administrative burden and costs to the health care system. At the same time, we also must recognize our responsibility — as well as other stakeholders' — to offer more creative and innovative approaches to address this matter through care transformation.

Among other solutions, the AHA has advocated for simplifying administrative and regulatory processes; using evidenced-based care management programs to care for medically complex patients; reforming the medical liability system; implementing payment and delivery system reforms, including accelerating the adoption of value-based arrangements and expanding access to palliative care toward the end of life; and reducing clinical practice variation. The AHA throughout the year will share additional materials and proposed solutions.

The campaign trail leading up to the election in November 2026 is an opportunity for constituents to interact with current members of Congress and other candidates. Additionally, it is a time for hospitals and health systems to educate and engage lawmakers on critical issues that impact that impact their communities.

The following sample questions and background information are designed for your use when attending town halls, hosting lawmakers at your hospital or having discussions with candidates on the campaign trail.

## **Issue:** The Need to Stabilize the Financial Health of Hospitals and Health Systems

### ***Background:***

America's hospitals and health systems are the backbone of American health care, providing essential care and services 24/7/365 and serving as trusted community anchors. Congress must ensure access to health care coverages, which includes helping to make health care more affordable while also providing hospitals and health systems with the financial support they need to continue serving patients and communities.

## **Questions:**

**When you think about making health care more affordable for patients and families, what principles guide your approach, and how would you balance reducing costs with ensuring hospitals can sustain critical services?**

**Affordability in health care is influenced by many factors — insurance design, workforce pressures, drug costs, regulation and more. What areas do you see as offering the greatest opportunities to lower costs without undermining access to care?**

**Hospitals and health systems continue to have concerns about the impact OBBBA will have on patient access to care in the coming years. Given that many of these patients will now turn to emergency departments when they have nowhere else to go, how will you assess these effects on the broader health care system and on patients' ability to receive timely care? What practical steps will you support to prevent EDs from becoming overwhelmed so they can continue serving their communities effectively?**

**Millions of people rely on marketplace coverage for their health care. How do you view the role of the Enhanced Premium Tax Credits in maintaining affordable coverage, and what factors should guide Congress as it considers whether to extend them?**

**What actions have you taken, or would you take as an elected official, to provide support for your hospitals and health systems?**

**What actions — such as improving federal funding for Medicare, Medicaid and other federal programs — would you take to provide assistance to economically fragile safety-net hospitals who play a critical role in providing care to the underserved communities?**

## **AHA Position: Reject Site-neutral Payment Policies**

Hospital outpatient departments should continue to be paid rates that account for the fact that they treat sicker and more complex patients, provide unique benefits to the community (such as 24/7 access to emergency care) and serve in a standby capacity for disaster response — all while also complying with more licensing and regulatory requirements than other health care entities.

## **Questions:**

**What is your position on cutting critical financial assistance for hospital services based on site of care?**

**As Congress explores ways to improve health care affordability, how do you think policymakers should evaluate site-neutral payment proposals, particularly their potential impact on access to care in rural communities where hospitals often provide services that aren't available in other settings?**

## **AHA Position: Protect the 340B Program**

The 340B Drug Pricing Program is a critical lifeline for eligible hospitals, enabling them to stretch scarce federal resources and expand access to care for patients and communities. The program currently faces significant threats which would fundamentally alter its structure and purpose. Proposals to replace the longstanding upfront discount model with a manufacturer-driven rebate approach would impose substantial cashflow disruptions, increase administrative burden and divert hospital resources away from patient care. In addition, efforts to expand unnecessary and duplicative reporting requirements risk undermining hospitals' ability

to effectively participate in the program. We oppose efforts to scale back or weaken the 340B program or impose new rebate or reporting requirements that jeopardize hospital financial stability and access to care for vulnerable populations.

### ***Question:***

**As Congress considers both protecting 340B and evaluating proposals like the 340B rebate program, how would you ensure these efforts strengthen and not weaken hospitals' ability to serve their communities?**

### **AHA Position: Preserve the Ban on Physician-owned Hospitals**

Self-referral arrangements in health care are the antithesis of fair competition and lead to overutilization and waste. Since 2003, Congress has supported limiting the ability of hospitals owned by physician investors to bill Medicare. Owners of these facilities provide limited or no emergency care and cherry-pick the best-insured patients and highest-reimbursing cases; in doing so, these facilities jeopardize the viability of community hospitals, which in contrast rely on a mix of services and patients to remain open. We oppose legislation that would weaken current law restrictions on the growth of these arrangements.

### ***Question:***

**What is your position on policies and laws that allow self-referral hospitals to proliferate once again?**

### **AHA Position: Hold Consumer Health Plans Accountable for Their Actions**

Certain practices undertaken by commercial health plans threaten patient access to care, contribute to clinician burnout, and drive excessive administrative costs and burden in the health care system. The AHA has documented how these policies compromise patient safety and increase financial strain on hospitals. Policymakers should increase oversight of health plans and advance legislation that streamlines prior authorization, curbs abusive payment delays and denials, enforces strong prompt-pay requirements and strengthens network adequacy standards. The AHA supports legislative efforts that seek to address these concerns and protect patients' health by streamlining and simplifying prior authorization requirements.

### ***Questions:***

**What actions would you support to hold commercial health plans accountable and ensure that medical decisions are driven by clinicians rather than insurers?**

**Harmful insurer practices — like excessive prior authorization and constant administrative hurdles — pull clinicians away from patient care and fuel burnout. What will you do to stop these burdensome commercial plan tactics and protect clinicians' time at the bedside?**

## **Issue: Strengthen and Support the Health Care Workforce**

### ***Background:***

A talented, qualified and engaged 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. Rising rates of physical violence and verbal abuse toward hospital staff is yet

another challenge hospitals and health systems encounter as they seek to recruit and retain their workers. Not only does such 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 Save Healthcare Workers Act (H.R. 3178 / S. 1600), 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.

### **Questions:**

**Workplace violence and intimidation are major barriers to keeping health care workers safe and able to provide quality care. How do you view the role of federal legislation, such as the Save Healthcare Workers Act, in addressing this issue, and what additional approaches should policymakers consider to better protect hospital employees and strengthen the overall care environment?**

**As we work to ensure that patients continue to have access to high-quality care, how do you think federal policy should evolve to help hospitals recruit and retain a talented and engaged workforce, especially given rising burnout and mental health strain?**

## **Issue:** Transforming Health Care Delivery for a Healthier Future for Patients and Communities

### **Background:**

Hospitals and health systems lead the way in developing innovations that are transforming how care is delivered — from expanding telehealth and remote monitoring to deploying AI tools that improve clinical decision-making, reduce administrative burden and strengthen patient safety. At the same time, investments in modern, interoperable health IT infrastructure are enabling more seamless, coordinated care across settings.

These advances are especially critical for the future of rural hospitals, which rely on digital connectivity and new care models to sustain access in communities facing staffing shortages, financial pressures and long travel distances for care. Lawmakers must continue to support and scale these innovations to build a healthier future for patients and the communities we serve.

### **Questions:**

**How do you think Congress should support the next generation of health care innovations — from AI to telehealth to modernized health IT — so hospitals can keep improving care for their communities?**

**As hospitals expand telehealth, accelerate the use of AI, strengthen health IT infrastructure and work to sustain care access in rural communities, how would you support policies that help scale these innovations and ensure all patients benefit from them?**

## **AHA Position:** Protect Rural Health Care and Make It Sustainable

Rural hospitals and health systems are the lifeblood of their communities and are committed to preserving local access to health care. At the same time, these hospitals are experiencing unprecedented challenges that jeopardize access and services. Lower patient volumes make it challenging for rural hospitals to maintain fixed-

operating costs. Additionally, hospitals and health systems are facing significant financial challenges due to the increased cost of caring for patients. Expenses associated with labor, drugs, purchased services and equipment have all increased. Rural hospitals' patient mix also makes them more reliant on public programs and, thus, particularly vulnerable to Medicare and Medicaid payment cuts.

***Question:***

**What steps would you take to provide relief for small and rural hospitals to ensure they can continue to provide health care services to their communities?**

**AHA Position: Acknowledge Behavioral Health Care as a Necessary Service in All Communities**

Mental health and physical health are inextricably linked. Unfortunately, the chronic underfunding for behavioral health services has intensified hospitals' and health systems' ability to retain critical staff and provide services, especially as the financial pressures of the past several years further eroded hospitals' ability to subsidize these services. As the need for behavioral health services continues to rise, the nation is ill-prepared to respond to these needs due to severe shortages in the behavioral health workforce.

***Question:***

**Whether it is expanding access to telehealth services, strengthening the behavioral health workforce or expanding access to substance use disorder treatments, what legislative proposals do you support to expand access to behavioral health care?**