Hospitals Keep Communities Healthy

By Rick Pollack, President and CEO, American Hospital Association

The driving mission of all hospitals and health systems, regardless of size and location, is to provide quality and compassionate care to patients and advance health in their communities.

During the last three years of the greatest public health crisis of our lifetime, our nation has seen firsthand how America's hospitals, health systems and health care workers stepped up by caring for patients, providing countless essential services to their communities and saving lives.

The fact is America's hospitals and health systems:

- Provide care to all who need it, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- Provide other services and programs to advance health and wellness and drive research, education and innovation.
- Serve as a source of millions of good jobs and as economic anchors in communities across the country

Beyond administering lifesaving and emergency medical care to patients around the clock, all hospitals provide incomparable value to their communities. They also go beyond those essential services by leading initiatives and working in partnership with others to improve and sustain the health of all of those in their communities.

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These efforts are as diverse as the communities hospitals serve. Some examples include neighborhood health clinics, food banks and programs to address food insecurity, medical research, affordable housing, behavioral health services, transportation to appointments and education to improve health and well-being. Importantly, these benefits are specifically tailored to meet the many varied health needs of the communities the hospital serves.

Research underscores the tremendous value hospitals provide to their communities.

- Tax-exempt hospitals and health systems alone, which make up about 60% of the field, provided over $110 billion in community benefits in 2019, the most recent year data is available.
- Benefits to the community are almost nine times the value of their federal tax exemption.
- In total, hospitals of all types have provided $745 billion in uncompensated care to patients since 2000.
- Hospitals support programs to meet unmet community needs, while absorbing many costs of caring for the needy and uninsured; provide care through government programs that cover less than the actual cost of care; provide services, such as burn units and neonatal services that typically operate at a financial loss but are essential for patients and communities; and take on administrative costs necessary to comply with overreaching government and commercial insurance company regulation.

Going beyond the statistics, every day there are thousands of examples of hospitals, health systems and caregivers saving lives, providing care for countless injuries and illnesses, and going beyond those critical services to support the health of their communities. These efforts distinguish hospitals and health systems from all other sectors in health care, most of which have no commitment to serving everyone in their community and much too frequently deny or limit care.

When people see the blue "H," they know that there is a hospital always there, ready to care, as we work to advance health in America.

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