



Telling the Hospital Story

Background

Members of Congress will soon be voting on legislation that could have a significant and potentially harmful impact on health care in California. This legislation includes policies that would affect hospital financial stability such as Medicaid financing, access to health care coverage, rural hospital care, site-neutral payments, disproportionate share hospital cuts, 340B, and more.

It's critical that your representative understands the vital role Medicare and Medicaid play for your patients and your hospital. Tell them about how Medicare and Medicaid support your communities' economies, health, and overall stability, including the programs' impact on your patients and on hospital finances.

When reaching out to their offices — **by February 28, please** — use the following guidance for all letters, calls, or in-person meetings.

Tell the Story of Your Community and Your Hospital

Members of Congress are often unaware of the role that Medicare and Medicaid play — not as just as insurance for patients, but also as primary payers to providers.

- Outline the percentage of Medicare and Medicaid enrollees in your community, as well as those with commercial insurance. [District-specific information](#) is available, but the details for your hospital matter most. The order of magnitude of government payment is a critical part of the message to demonstrate your financial condition and, therefore, your ability to provide care.
- Share the number of babies born with Medicaid coverage and the percentage of patients who are elderly or disabled.
- Help your representative understand that limits on how states raise their share of the match (provider taxes, directed payments) will not be funded through California's state budget. Instead, those "limits" would simply be cuts.
- Share what would happen if the federal government reduced its support for Medicare and Medicaid and provide a clear picture of the impact on patients, services, the local economy, and your long- or short-term viability.
- Highlight service or staff reductions that could be a result of Medicare and Medicaid cuts.

Fine-Tune Your Message

Always put patients first. As you discuss finances and your hospital, make sure it's through the lens of how they relate to caring for patients. Focus on the excellent care you provide for patients, rather than construction projects or other facility highlights.

An expensive new piece of equipment is certainly part of the financial pressures facing hospitals, but rather than emphasize the cost of the equipment, it is better to frame it as a percentage of expenses and better yet, a necessary investment in the specific care you provide to patients. Is it more efficient? Does it expedite healing? Does it minimize patient time in the hospital?

Similarly, rather than noting that there are 10 patients boarding in the emergency department (ED), explain how many ED beds you have, what boarding means, and how it translates to wait times for others. In all cases, humanize the strain your hospital is under, and what additional strain would mean for patients.

Use facts and data. These can support your arguments and illustrate how the proposals would affect your community and patients.

Data help tell your story, so be sure to put numbers in context. Use comparisons to the previous year or as a percentage of a larger number. For example, pharmaceutical costs are \$10 million — an increase of 30% over last year while Medicare provided just a meager increase, and Medicaid did not raise rates at all.

Avoid jargon and acronyms. Use plain language. Stick to your message. If you don't know the answer to a question, promise to follow up with the complete information.

Focus on actionable issues. Elected officials want to be helpful, but there are bright lines between state and federal jurisdiction. For example, when talking to your member of Congress it's fair to use seismic or minimum wage as illustrations of financial pressures, but they can't address those issues in Washington so don't dwell on them. Focus instead on federal policy like Medicare, Medi-Cal, 340B, and DSH, where they can be helpful. Use CHA's two federal letters for additional guidance on topics to raise:

- [CHA Letter on Continuing Resolution Priorities](#)
- [CHA Letter on Federal Budget Reconciliation](#)

Use specific examples. Use specific examples rather than broad or financially focused descriptions. For example, "We are most proud of our efforts to provide mental health services to local schools by sending art therapists once a week." That's far more compelling than a dollar figure reflecting the total investment in mental health services.

Questions for Members of Congress

Ask your representative what they are hearing about budget plans and what they plan to do to help you continue providing care. Ask how you can best follow up in the days ahead and as legislative proposals become clearer.