



January 5, 2022

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: AB 1394 (Irwin) – SUPPORT, IF AMENDED

Dear Assembly Member Wood:

The California Hospital Association (CHA) recognizes that suicide is preventable and supports efforts to effectively identify at-risk people and intervene as early as possible. Mental health needs across the nation have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency. While the most recent report on suicide rates in the U.S. found they are generally on the decline, it also noted alarming increases among adults ages 25-34, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Black Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

Under current federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations, as well accreditation requirements promulgated by The Joint Commission, hospitals play a key role in screening for suicide risk. CMS guidelines require hospitals to identify patients at risk of self-harm or harm to others and take steps they to minimize those risks in accordance with nationally recognized standards and guidelines.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1394 would require general acute care hospitals in California to screen all patients over the age of 8 for suicide risk, as well as follow national protocols and screening tools published by the National Institute of Mental Health. While we support the goal of reducing suicide in California, we do have some concerns about how the bill would be operationalized and hope they can be addressed through amendments.

Research shows screening hospital patients for suicide risk can identify patients in need and provide opportunities to offer support. However, we are concerned that AB 1394 could effectively result in a one-size-fits-all approach for suicide screening. Hospital staff should be empowered to use their clinical judgment and conduct suicide screening in a manner that is culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate. As written, the approach outlined in the bill could also create unintended liability for providers.

CHA and our more than 400 hospital and health system members would be pleased to support AB 1394 if amended to address these concerns. We look forward to working with the author and lending our members' expertise to craft these amendments.

Sincerely,



Alex Hawthorne
Vice President, State Relations & Advocacy

cc: The Honorable Jacqui Irwin
Members, Assembly Health Committee
Judy Babcock, Consultant, Assembly Health Committee
Gino Folchi, Consultant, Republican Caucus