ESSENTIAL HOSPITALS TACKLE SOCIAL BARRIERS TO GOOD HEALTH FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Essential hospitals share a mission to ensure all people, regardless of their social and economic circumstances, can access high-quality health care. They operate in a broad variety of communities—from expansive rural regions to the nation’s largest cities, all facing significant social and economic needs. Essential hospitals serve communities in great need, where:

- 360,000 individuals struggle with homelessness;
- 10 million people have limited access to nutritious food;
- 23.9 million individuals live below the poverty line; and
- more than 17 million are uninsured.

Studies show social risk factors—employment, food insecurity, housing instability, access to transportation, and others—can create barriers to a healthy lifestyle and lead to poor health care outcomes.

HOW ESSENTIAL HOSPITALS CONFRONT SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Essential hospitals partner with local organizations and agencies to confront social determinants of health and improve life for vulnerable patients and underserved communities. These examples are just a few of the many innovative programs at essential hospitals to help patients and communities overcome social and economic barriers to good health:

University of Illinois (UI) Health is in one of the highest concentrations of city homelessness in Chicago. In response to this crisis, UI Health created the Better Health Through Housing program, a health care-to-housing program for homeless patients. In partnership with the Center for Housing and Health, UI Health created a housing collaborative of more than 20 agencies that manage 125 to 150 one-bedroom apartments throughout the city, as well as three single-room facilities that serve as bridge units until permanent supportive housing is found. As a result of the program, internal health care costs have fallen 21 percent, emergency department (ED) utilization is down 45 percent, and inpatient admissions have been reduced by 55 percent.

Broadlawns Medical Center, in Des Moines, Iowa, developed the TECH and TEACH programs to provide education, training, and awareness for health care career opportunities for high school students and adults. These paid education and training programs identify at-risk people from underserved neighboring communities and help them earn a certified nursing assistant degree. The first group of TECH students completed their training in April 2017, and Broadlawns hired seven of those 10 graduates.

Regional One Health, in Memphis, Tennessee, created the ONE Health program to reduce the human and financial costs among Regional One Health’s highest of high-utilizers. The goal of this model of care is to improve patient outcomes and experiences within the health care system and lower unnecessary hospital use, reducing the cost of care. Regional One partnered with Camden Coalition to analyze patient data to better understand trends related to their patients’ circumstances. For the 101 patients who have benefitted from the program, ONE Health avoided $1.75 million in costs and decreased inpatient admissions, inpatient days, and ED visits by 69, 756, and 156, respectively. Overall, the program generated a $1.95 million benefit to the hospital’s bottom line.

Hurley Medical Center, in Flint, Michigan, created its Food FARMacy to help reduce food insecurity and improve patient and population health within the hospital’s community. The Food FARMacy, an onsite food supply center, ensures patients who screen positive for food insecurity can access immediate assistance. Patients and family members who lack access to food can access the Food FARMacy for a wide variety of foods that align with U.S. Department of Agriculture MyPlate nutritional guidelines, as well as receive advice on how to create
complete meals. Through partnerships with local food banks and foundations, Hurley’s Food FARMacy has provided nutritional food and resources to more than 2,200 household members. The hospital recently received a grant to fill this growing demand by expanding the Food FARMacy at other local, non-Hurley clinics and preparing emergency take-home food bags for individuals.

These stories illustrate the social and economic challenges those communities face and how essential hospitals approach their mission to deliver compassionate, affordable, high-quality care for their patients. Without essential hospitals, people in these communities would lack the support and services they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

**OUR ASK TO CONGRESS**

Essential hospitals do all this while operating with limited means—their operating margins are about a fifth that of other hospitals, and they shoulder a disproportionate share of the nation’s uncompensated care costs. These financial challenges drive our hospitals to accomplish more with less. As a result, their innovative programs elevate quality, add value, reduce disparities, and improve population health.

**Congress therefore must act to preserve the safety-net supports that essential hospitals rely on to fulfill their mission of care for all, such as Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments and the 340B Drug Pricing Program.**