

AHA TOUTS MAJOR PATIENT SAFETY GAINS IN HOSPITALS AS WHITE HOUSE RAMPS UP FEDERAL EFFORTS

The American Hospital Association (AHA) has been touting its new patient safety report — which shows significant improvements in U.S. hospital safety since 2019 despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic — in recent discussions with White House officials, as the Biden administration ramps up efforts to strengthen the federal government's patient safety infrastructure.

AHA's report, based on first-quarter 2024 data from 715 acute care hospitals across 49 states and DC, found efforts between April 2023 and March 2024 resulted in 200,000 more patients surviving care episodes than in 2019. Preventive care also surged, with breast, colon, and cervical cancer screenings rising 60-80% above pre-pandemic levels, according to the report. The report also found hospitals significantly reduced central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSI) and catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTI), both of which spiked during the pandemic but are now below pre-pandemic levels.

Despite the rise in both patient numbers and severity since 2019 along with ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining health care workers, hospitals have continued to improve patient outcomes — a testament to the dedication and hard work of the healthcare workforce, according to Chris DeRienzo, AHA's chief physician executive.

"We know we're in the midst of a workforce crisis, but it is the hard work every single day of doctors and nurses and patient care techs and radiology techs and laboratory techs, and all the people who work to support them and all the people who work to equip them, that drives this kind of improvement," DeRienzo said.

Members of the AHA patient safety initiative discussed their report with Biden administration officials during the White House's September 17 forum on patient safety, where the administration unveiled the creation of a cross-agency, public-private National Action Alliance for Patient and Workforce Safety, led by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

The White House also announced CMS plans to add a patient safety component, such as a structural safety measure or policy, to its public reporting and quality programs. Meanwhile, the agency will explore existing authorities to prevent payment for services that cause harm where appropriate. By 2026, CMS aims to address health care disparities and elevate patient voices through the development of a patient-reported safety measure, according to the White House.

As the federal government invests in patient safety, DeRienzo believes AHA's patient safety report offers vital evidence for policymakers to recognize the improvements hospitals have already made and continue to build on.