

**Statement  
of the  
American Hospital Association  
for the  
Subcommittee on Health  
of the  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
of the  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**“Caring for America: Legislation to Support Patients, Caregivers, and Providers.”**

**October 26, 2021**

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) urges enactment of H.R. 1667, the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, as well as additional consideration of legislative action to address the workforce challenges facing our health care system today.

More than 20 months after the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the U.S., the pandemic continues to affect communities across the country. To date, there have been more than [44 million cases](#) of COVID-19 in the U.S. and [more than 700,000 deaths](#). Throughout the pandemic, hospitals and health systems and their workforces have remained on the front lines mobilizing resources to ensure access to care for the patients and communities they serve. Hospitals have provided inpatient care to more than [3 million COVID-19 patients](#) since August of last year.

The pandemic has taken an enormous toll on health care workers, who have seen first-hand the devastating impact of the pandemic. A [Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post poll](#) found that about 3 in 10 health care workers considered leaving their profession, and about 6 in 10 said pandemic-related stress had harmed their mental health. In addition, a [survey by AHA’s American Organization for Nursing Leadership](#) found that one of the top challenges and



reasons for health care staffing shortages reported by nurses was “emotional health and wellbeing of staff.”

Another recent study on the experiences of health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic found that 93% reported experiencing stress, 86% reported experiencing anxiety, 77% reported frustration, 76% reported exhaustion and burnout, and 75% said they were overwhelmed.<sup>1</sup> Worry and stress lead to sleep disturbances, headaches or stomachaches, and increased alcohol or drug use.<sup>2</sup> Yet only 13% of front-line health care workers received behavioral health services as a result of worry and stress.

A sufficient, healthy workforce is foundational to maintaining access to high quality care, especially as hospitals are strained by crises such as surges in COVID-19 hospitalizations. The AHA has joined #FirstRespondersFirst, the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation, American Medical Association, American Nurses Foundation and Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare in launching [All In: Wellbeing First for Healthcare](#), a call to action for health care organizations to prioritize workforce well-being.

Bipartisan legislation being considered by the subcommittee today, the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, aims to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout and behavioral health disorders among health care professionals. The legislation, named for a doctor who led the emergency department at NewYork-Presbyterian Allen Hospital, would, among other provisions, authorize grants to health care providers to establish programs that offer behavioral health services for front-line workers. In addition, the bill would require the Department of Health and Human Services to study and develop recommendations on strategies to address provider burnout and facilitate resiliency, and it would direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch a campaign encouraging health care workers to seek assistance when needed. A modified version of this legislation has already passed the Senate, and we urge the House to approve it as well so it can be signed into law.

In addition to this important legislation, the AHA asks that you look at the overall issue of workforce as you consider legislation to support patients, caregivers and providers. Hospitals and health systems face mounting and critical staffing shortages that could jeopardize access to care in the communities they serve. For example, AHA survey data show that between 2019 and 2020, job vacancies for various types of nursing personnel increased by up to 30%, and for respiratory therapists by 31%. These shortages are expected to persist, with an [analysis](#) of EMSI data showing there will be a shortage of up to 3.2 million health care workers by 2026. The AHA urges Congress to prioritize funding that supports the health care workforce needs of the country in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future. This includes lifting the cap on Medicare-funded physician residencies, boosting support for nursing schools and

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<sup>1</sup> Mental Health America. The Mental Health of Healthcare Workers in COVID-19, accessed July 5, 2021.

<https://mhanational.org/mental-health-healthcare-workers-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. KFF/Post Survey Reveals the Serious Mental Health Challenges Facing Frontline Healthcare Workers A Year Into the COVID-19 Pandemic, April 6, 2021. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/press-release/kff-post-survey-reveals-the-serious-mental-health-challenges-facing-frontline-health-care-workers-a-year-into-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

faculty, expediting visas for qualified international nurses and supporting programs that address clinician well-being.

We thank you for your leadership on behalf of the nation's health care workforce, and we look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.