



Leading for Better Health

March 23, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly,

I am writing on behalf of the 240 hospitals of Pennsylvania to ask for \$650 million to be set aside in a grant fund from the \$7.293 billion the state will receive from the federal American Rescue Plan Act.

The funds would be used to:

- Rebuild and support the hospital workforce, which has given its all this year
- Support and improve Pennsylvania's behavioral health system, which unfortunately is relied upon now more than ever
- Provide funds to strengthen the hospital role in securing a vital public health infrastructure for the future

Despite different perspectives on the past year, we can all agree that this public health crisis has impacted every single issue of importance to every policymaker. To call the past year a challenge for Pennsylvania's hospital community is an understatement of immense proportions—but a challenge that they rose to meet head on. I cannot tell you how many times I heard our members say, "I don't know how we're going to manage, but we'll make it work, *because it's the right thing to do.*"

Shouldering responsibility for so much of the public health response in almost every community around the state demands sacrifice, including significant financial strain and immeasurable pressure on our most important resource—hospital staff.

Through the establishment of the **Health Care Heroes and Public Health Preparedness Act**, which will allocate \$650 million received from the American Rescue Plan to a strictly defined grant program for hospitals and health systems, you will help change the trajectory of health care in Pennsylvania.

Please support the creation of a grant program which will allow hospitals to apply for resources needed to continue to respond to the health crisis, generate economic activity, and prepare for future public health challenges.

Sincerely,

Andy Carter

President and Chief Executive Officer
The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

Health Care Heroes and Public Health Preparedness Act

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ADDENDUM: Health Care Heroes and Public Health Preparedness Act

Grant Program Proposal Overview—\$650 million in federal funding would be allocated to this program.

- This legislation would create defined award criteria, and the responsibility for distributing grant funding would be delegated to an agency with appropriate legislative oversight and reporting
- Funds would be distributed based on demonstrated need until funding is depleted
- In light of the availability of direct federal funding for many COVID-19-related costs, the legislation would ensure that funds could not be used to reimburse expenses or losses that have been fully reimbursed from other sources or that other sources are obligated to reimburse
- Grant recipients also would be required to submit reports and maintain documentation as the commonwealth requires, and be subject to audit by the Auditor General

Restoring the Health Care Workforce—Prior to the pandemic, hospitals struggled to develop and maintain a robust workforce.

- With the onset of COVID-19, many clinical staff have moved up retirement plans or otherwise chosen to leave the workforce
- There is an increased need for behavioral health support and wellness and resiliency programs
- With the adoption of telehealth and other new ways to deliver health care, hospital staff require training resources to ensure the health care workforce keeps pace with technological innovations
- Possible Grant Requests:
 - Specialized training programs to support innovative care delivery models (e.g. telemedicine)
 - Employee counseling and resiliency programs
 - Retention programs for high-need clinical staff impacted by COVID-19

Strengthening and Maintaining Public Health Infrastructure—To maintain access to care, the viability of the hospitals, and the health of their communities, it is important to provide an opportunity for these hospitals that suffered financial losses and incurred significant costs due to the pandemic to seek and obtain federal funding allocated to states.

- Hospitals have provided ongoing public health support to local public health departments
- For many hospitals and health systems, future capital plans have been suspended or modified, and timelines have been extended or designs reworked to account for social distancing, increased reliance on telehealth services, or other emerging factors
- Possible grant requests:
 - Public health infrastructure programs to prepare for future health emergencies
 - Vaccination outreach or other programs targeting underserved communities



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Addressing Behavioral Health/Post-Acute Capacity and Barriers—The pandemic has exacerbated the existing crisis of inadequate post-acute placements and behavioral health services.

- Pennsylvania needs solutions to help patients receive the care they need after they leave the hospital. These solutions will vary from place to place; one-size-fits-all remedies rarely work
- Possible grant requests:
 - Equipment/software to implement telepsychiatry programs for hospitals in rural or other underserved areas
 - Community programs to recruit and train behavioral health providers in high-need areas