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## VHHA in Action

Each day, VHHA actively works on behalf of its members, their employees, and Virginians to advance the interests of Virginia's hospitals and health care systems. In the past week, these are some developments of interest to Virginia hospitals and health systems:

### **VHHA, VHHA Foundation Host 2025 Virginia Behavioral Health Summit**

- This week, VHHA and the VHA Foundation hosted the **2025 Virginia Behavioral Health Summit** on Sept. 25 as an in-person event at The Westin – Richmond. "Community: Building an Accessible System of Care Across the Continuum" was the theme for the event that featured

innovative behavioral health models, patient-centered strategies, an overview of the expansion of the crisis system across the state, and the opportunity to learn about advances in technology that can improve behavioral health resources. The 2025 Summit featured a robust lineup of speakers, panel discussions, and breakout sessions including keynote remarks on the topic of compassionate behavioral health from renowned aviator and explorer **Ryan Campbell**, as well as a closing keynote address from **Tom Farley** on recovery and advocacy inspired by the legacy of his departed brother, actor and comedian **Chris Farley**. The programming lineup also included sessions on emergency department innovations in behavioral health access, the role of AI in enhancing care, crisis services, autism care, primary care integration, employee engagement, and law enforcement community relationships. Representatives from **Ballad Health, Bon Secours – Richmond, Carilion Clinic, Centra, Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, the Hampton (VA) Police Department, Hopelink Behavioral Health, Inova, Riverside Health, Sentara Health, Valley Health, VCU Health, VHC Health, Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), VHHA, and the Virginia Treatment Center for Children** were among the Summit’s featured participants. VHHA and the VHHA Foundation extend their gratitude to Summit speakers and attendees for their participation and to the following sponsors whose support helped make this year’s event possible: [Qualivis](#), [Dominion Energy](#), [Augusta Health](#), [Ballad Health](#), [Bon Secours](#), [Carilion Clinic](#), [Centra](#), [Chesapeake Regional Healthcare](#), [HCA Virginia](#), [Inova](#), [Iris Telehealth](#), [Mary Washington Healthcare](#), [Riverside Health](#), [Sentara Health](#), [The Pavilion](#), [TSW](#), [Valley Health System](#), [VHC Health](#), [VHHA Solutions](#), [Backpack Healthcare](#), [Sovah Health](#), and [Williams Mullen](#). View the Summit program brochure [here](#), see an event photo gallery through this [link](#), and read more [here](#).

#### **VHHA Solutions, RCM&D, Avoca Risk Announce New Cybersecurity Offering for Businesses**

- Understanding cybersecurity vulnerabilities is an essential component of risk management planning for any organization that relies on digital technology infrastructure. To support that work, [VHHA Solutions](#) has partnered with [RCM&D](#) and Avoca Risk to launch an innovative new cybersecurity program – [CyberRx Hub](#) – to help organizations assess risk, develop and implement policies and procedures, enhance staff training on cyber threat awareness, establish response strategies, and provide industry leading coverage for organizations. RCM&D is the exclusive insurance broker for this program with free and discounted cyber risk management services administered by Avoca Risk, a Managing General Agent (MGA) that also provides proprietary insurance products for all lines of business, including cyber insurance. Virginia health care organizations that partner with VHHA and VHHA Solutions will receive complimentary access to the CyberRx Hub platform, which offers an interactive suite of resources to help firms proactively manage cyber risks, prepare for potential incidents, and strengthen digital resilience and recovery. Through this program, organizations will have on-demand access to incident response planning resources, cyber risk assessment tools, employee training modules, and real-world claims data that enables them to better understand the financial and operational impact of cyber threats. Read more [here](#).

#### **VHHA Hosts In-Person Meeting of Healthcare Safety & Security Forum**

- This week, VHHA held an in-person meeting of the **Healthcare Safety & Security Workgroup** at VHHA offices in Glen Allen, VA. The workgroup includes hospital safety and security leaders focused on sharing experiences, ideas, and best practices regarding current and future safety,

security, violence prevention, and response activities in Virginia hospitals and health systems. Contact **Abraham Segres** at [asegres@vhha.com](mailto:asegres@vhha.com) with questions about the group.

#### **VHHA Hosts Meeting of Chief Medical Officers, Physician Leaders Forum**

- This week, VHHA held a meeting of the **Chief Medical Officers & Physician Leaders Forum**. Agenda topics included updates on legislative and regulatory matters and physician well-being work. Contact **Abraham Segres** at [asegres@vhha.com](mailto:asegres@vhha.com) with questions about the group.

#### **VHHA Hosts Meeting of Virginia Chief Nursing Officers and Nurse Leaders Forum**

- This week, VHHA hosted a meeting of the **Virginia Chief Nursing Officers and Nurse Leaders Forum**. Agenda topics included updates on legislative and regulatory matters and workforce development initiatives. Contact **Abraham Segres** at [asegres@vhha.com](mailto:asegres@vhha.com) with questions about the group.

#### **VHHA Hosts Meeting of Payor Advisory Committee**

- This week, VHHA held a meeting of the **Payor Advisory Committee**. The Committee is a forum for hospital payor relations and revenue cycle leaders to discuss priority issues and ongoing payor-related challenges. Contact **Craig Connors** at [cconnors@vhha.com](mailto:cconnors@vhha.com) to inquire about the committee.

#### **View VHEMP Webinar Recording from Presentation on ‘Special Pathogen Treatment Centers’**

- The **Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program (VHEMP)** recently hosted a webinar on Regional Emerging Special Pathogen Treatment Centers (RESPTC). View a webinar recording [here](#) and presentation slides through this [link](#).

#### **VHHA Seeks Hospital Staff Input in 2025 Member Feedback Survey**

- The **2025 VHHA Member Feedback Survey** is an annual opportunity for individuals who work in VHHA member hospitals and health systems, as well as other stakeholders engaged with the Association, to share their insights and observations about VHHA, its work, programming, and engagement activities. Survey responses help VHHA improve its service to members. Please take a moment to complete the survey and share feedback about VHHA [here](#).

#### **VHHA Encourages Hospital Staff to Consider Applying for Sorensen Political Leaders Program**

- As part of its partnership with the **Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership** at the **University of Virginia**, VHHA encourages hospital staff and leaders to apply for the 2026 Political Leaders Program. Applications are being accepted until Nov. 12. The 2026 cohort program will run from March-December. Visit this [link](#) for more information and to access the program application. In 2020, VHHA [entered into a partnership with Sorensen](#) to support its programming and help identify health care leaders who are strong candidates for the Political Leaders Program. The program draws applicants from across the state and focuses on Virginia politics and governing, policy issues and solutions, regional needs, ethical servant leadership, and efforts to unite the

Commonwealth. This program is primarily focused on individuals who are 10-plus years removed from college. Prospective program applicants from VHHA hospitals or health systems are encouraged to contact VHHA President and CEO **Sean T. Connaughton** at [sconnaughton@vhha.com](mailto:sconnaughton@vhha.com) to discuss this opportunity and the ways in which VHHA can support applicants.

### **VHHA Issues Call for 2026 Patient Safety Summit Poster Abstract Submissions**

- Ahead of the **2026 Virginia Patient Safety Summit**, VHHA invites staff from member hospitals and health systems to submit poster abstracts showcasing evidence-based quality and safety improvement projects. Submitted abstracts topics may include patient safety, quality improvement, and safety culture; care coordination, patient experience and patient-family engagement; population and community health; and workforce safety and well-being. Abstracts should be 400 words or less and should include tables, graphs, control charts, process maps, or key program drivers. Abstracts should contain data – those that don't will be excluded from consideration – and describe the problem, the intervention, results, and conclusions. The authors of selected abstracts will have the opportunity to record a video slide presentation with VHHA prior to the Summit and those videos will be shared on the online conference platform for attendees to view on-demand during the 2026 Patient Safety Summit, whose theme is "Safe Care, Every Step of the Way: Advancing a Culture of Safety in Healthcare." Submissions will be accepted from Oct. 6, 2025 to Oct. 24, 2025. An e-mail with a submission link will be distributed on Oct. 6. Contact **Rachel Pryor** at [rpryor@vhha.com](mailto:rpryor@vhha.com) with questions.

### **Nominations Open for 2025 VHHA Outstanding Service Awards**

- VHHA is accepting nominations for the **2025 VHHA Outstanding Service Awards**. The awards recognize individuals who have made a real difference to Virginia's hospitals and health systems, and to health care in general through selfless, energetic, and passionate service. Awards are presented in the following categories: the Distinguished Service Award (given to past or present chief executive officers), the Meritorious Service Award (given to non-CEO health care leaders), and the Excellence in Governance Award (given to members of hospital or health system governing bodies). Each award recognizes those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to contribute to Virginia's hospitals and health systems. The deadline to submit nomination materials is Sept. 26. The nomination form with submission instructions can be accessed through this [link](#). Read more about VHHA awards and see lists of past recipients [here](#).

### **VHHA in the News**

- VHHA actively engages with the news media to share public messaging and coordinate member media appearances to showcase the important work done by Virginia hospitals. That work is reflected in recent coverage from [WVVA](#), [VPM](#), and the [Harrisonburg Patch](#).

## **News Updates**

### **White House Cites Medicinal Link to Autism, Unveils Changes to H-1B Visa Program**

In an announcement this week, **U.S. President Donald J. Trump** and **U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** cited academic research as evidence suggesting a link between the use of acetaminophen as a pain reliver during pregnancy and rising cases of autism. The Trump Administration shared that position as part of a [broader effort](#) intended to confront the growth of autism diagnoses. The White House [highlighted several studies](#) in support of its stance that “acetaminophen use in pregnant women, especially late in pregnancy, may cause long-term neurological effects in their children.” In response to the White House announcement, the **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists** (ACOG) issued a [statement](#) to affirm the “safety and benefits of acetaminophen during pregnancy.” The **Autism Science Foundation** also issued a [statement](#) expressing concern about the White House declaration. In related action, the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) [indicated](#) it will issue a physician notice, start the process for a safety label change for acetaminophen, and launch a nationwide public service campaign to inform families and protect public health. The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) said it will act on a potential treatment for speech-related deficits associated with autism spectrum disorder through an intended label update on leucovorin for cerebral folate deficiency, which would make it the first FDA-recognized therapeutic for children with cerebral folate deficiency and autistic symptoms. In a separate development, the President signed a “Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers” proclamation [seeking to reform](#) the H-1B visa program to require a \$100,000 payment for new H-1B visa petitions. The proclamation does not apply to previously issued H-1B visas and does not prevent international travel by such visa holders. Physicians from other nations seeking to practice in the U.S. are among the professionals who have used these visas. Following the visa announcement, some [published reports](#) suggest physicians could qualify for exemptions from the new standard.

### **VDH Provides Update on Changes to Reportable Disease Regulations in Virginia**

In a recent [letter to clinicians](#), **Virginia State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen M. Shelton**, MD, advises that [Virginia Regulations for Disease Reporting and Control \(12VAC5-90\)](#) have been updated to bring them into compliance with changes in the field of communicable disease detection and control and to conform with state law. Among others, the changes include clarifications regarding influenza lab tests reporting, blood lead level submissions, monkeypox reporting, required reporting of identifying and contact information, and more. Additional information is available from the **Virginia Department of Health** (VDH) [here](#).

### **Medicaid DSH Cuts Impacting Hospitals are Scheduled to Take Effect**

Funding reductions for hospitals through the [Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital \(DSH\) program](#) that supports providers who care for vulnerable, low-income patients are set to take effect on Oct. 1. Federal law requires state Medicaid programs to make DHS payments to hospitals that serve a significant share of Medicaid and uninsured patients. Under the Affordable Care Act, state allocations for DSH payments were to be reduced over several years based on the assumption that increasing coverage would minimize the need for that type of funding. However, subsequent [action by Congress](#) has delayed the implementation of those cuts. Last week, a bipartisan group of congressional members sent a [letter](#) to House leadership urging action to prevent DSH cuts.

### **CDC Vaccine Advisory Panel Recommends Individual Decision-Making on COVID-19 Shot**

The vaccine advisory panel for the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) recently voted to update its recommendations regarding COVID-19 vaccination. The latest guidance from the **Advisory**

**Committee on Immunization Practices** (ACIP) is that individual patients should consult with their health care provider to determine whether the vaccine is right for them. That is a departure from [previous guidance for 2024-2025](#) that recommended vaccination for most adults. After a split vote, ACIP did not take action to require a prescription for the COVID-19 vaccine. In a [statement](#) earlier this month, **America’s Health Insurance Plans** (AHIP), the trade association representing large health insurers, indicated that “health plans will continue to cover all ACIP-recommended immunizations that were recommended as of September 1, 2025, including updated formulations of the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, with no cost-sharing for patients through the end of 2026.” **U.S. Health and Human Services** (HHS) **Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** previously [announced](#) that the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) has approved a new round of COVID-19 vaccine doses for this season for more limited use – specifically among adults 65 and older, children, and adults with a medical condition that puts them at risk for serious illness. Kennedy also said the vaccines would be “available for all patients who choose them after consulting with their doctors.”

### **CMS Shares Final Rule on Medicare Advantage, Prescription Drug Plans Disclosure**

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) recently issued a [final rule](#) related to policy and technical changes to Medicare Advantage, the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit program, the Medicare Cost Plan program, and Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE). The final rule implements Medicare Advantage disclosure requirement changes. The regulation is effective Nov. 17 and the final rule is applicable as of Jan. 1, 2026.

### **FDA Approves Cancer Immunotherapy Treatment**

The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) recently [approved](#) a subcutaneous injection version of Merck cancer immunotherapy Keytruda. The approval is for use in adults and pediatric patients 12 and older for 38 solid tumor indications. Additional prescribing information will be posted through this [link](#).

### **VHCF Announces New Maternal Health Initiative: ‘It Takes a Village’**

The **Virginia Health Care Foundation** (VHCF) recently [announced](#) the launch of a new maternal health program designed to bridge gaps in mental health care for moms across the Commonwealth. The [‘It Takes a Village’](#) initiative exists to facilitate support for mothers by partnering with behavioral health providers to offer telehealth and in-person counseling to pregnant or postpartum mothers experiencing persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, or confusion. The program partners with participating organizations to help moms in need find counseling services.

## **Events**

### **Register for APIC-VA Educational Conference Oct. 1-2**

The **Virginia Chapter of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology** (APIC-VA) is hosting its 50<sup>th</sup> annual conference Oct. 1-2 at the Hilton Richmond Hotel & Spa Short Pump. APIC-VA members include nurses, physicians, technologists, public health administrators, military personnel, and others involved in infection control and epidemiology. It is a multi-disciplinary voluntary organization committed to mentorship of members, support of best practices, and ultimately, improvement of the quality of health care throughout the continuum of varied practices. Learn more

about the organization [here](#) and view the conference program agenda as well as exhibitor and registration information through this [link](#).

### Register for the VONL Virtual Fall Conference on Oct. 3

Nurse leaders from across the Commonwealth are coming together for the virtual **VONL Fall Conference** scheduled for Oct. 3 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. The theme for the event is “Humanity and Innovation – Leading the Future of Compassionate, Accountable Care.” The theme represents a concept at the heart of modern nursing leadership – balancing cutting-edge innovation with the timeless commitment to compassionate care. The conference is being hosted as a virtual event with the intent of expanding access to nurse leaders for whom travel and time commitments associated with in-person events can be an impediment to participation. Register through this [link](#) and contact [VONLstaff@gmail.com](mailto:VONLstaff@gmail.com) with any event questions.

### VHHA Solutions to Host Cybersecurity Awareness Month Webinar Series

In October, [VHHA Solutions](#) will host a special webinar series in recognition of **Cybersecurity Awareness Month**. Each session will highlight the latest trends in cyber threats, real-world examples of how incidents unfold, and practical strategies to protect organizations, employees, and proprietary data. With insights from experts who work to safeguard sensitive information and guide recovery, this series offers actionable takeaways for IT, compliance, and leadership teams alike. Learn more and register [here](#).

## Podcast

### VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features Sentara Health Neurology Physician Leader

This episode of VHHA’s *Patients Come First* podcast features **Dr. Daniel Cohen**, Chief of Neurology for **Sentara Medical Group**, for a conversation about his work, depression and mental health awareness, the importance of self care in mental wellness, which for Dr. Cohen includes DJing as a hobby, and more. Listen to the episode [here](#) and hear past episodes through this [link](#). Podcast episodes are also available through these podcast apps and networks: [Apple Podcast](#), [Amazon Music](#), [Spotify](#), [Pandora](#), [Stitcher](#), [TuneIn](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Blubrry](#), [iHeart Radio](#), [Deezer](#), [Podbay](#), [Pocket Casts](#), the [Virginia Audio Collective](#), and the [World Podcast Network](#). The podcast can also be heard on the radio airwaves – episodes air Sundays at 9 a.m. on 100.5 FM, 107.7 FM, 92.7 FM, and 820 AM across Central Virginia and 1650 AM in Hampton Roads. Send questions, comments, feedback, or guest suggestions to [pcfpodcast@vhha.com](mailto:pcfpodcast@vhha.com).



## Around the State



**Dr. J. Stephen Jones, MD, FACS**, President and CEO of **Inova**, has been recognized with the 2025 Award of Excellence by **The Joint Commission**, an independent, evidence-based standards setting organization that sets the benchmark for safe, high-quality patient care through health care accreditation and certification. The annual Award of Excellence honors one individual for outstanding leadership and remarkable contributions to the field of health care. This award recognizes an individual’s commitment to significantly advancing The Joint Commission’s vision — and health care’s shared vision — that all people experience the safest, highest quality, best value health care across all settings. Read more [here](#).

After an extensive national search, **Jim Willis** has been approved by the **VCU Health System Authority Board of Directors** as the president of **VCU Medical Center**. Willis has been serving in the interim role since February. He brings 35 years of hospital leadership experience in the delivery of health care services to the role of VCU Medical Center president. Before stepping into the role of interim president, Willis served as chief operating officer (COO) of VCU Medical Center beginning in January 2024. Prior to that he served as interim COO from March 2023 to January 2024. Before joining VCU Health, Willis held a series of leadership roles for **HCA Healthcare-Methodist Health System** and University Health, both in San Antonio, TX. Willis earned a Master of Science degree in Environmental Science from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a Bachelor of Science degree in Nuclear Medicine Science from the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, TX. He initially joined VCU Health in June 2022 as vice president of professional services. Read more [here](#).



**Children’s National Hospital** has announced the appointment of **Dr. Michael “Mish” Shoykhet, MD, PhD**, as director of the Center for Neuroscience Research. Dr. Shoykhet has acted as interim Center for Neuroscience Research director since July 1, 2025, and was chosen to lead the center after a nationwide search. Dr. Shoykhet joined Children’s National in 2018 to serve as an attending physician in pediatric critical care medicine and principal investigator in the Center for Neuroscience Research. More recently, he has served as co-director of research in pediatric critical care medicine and medical director of Children’s National pediatric critical care medicine service at the NIH Clinical Center. Read more [here](#).

At this year’s RemarkaBall, **Riverside Foundation** celebrated two individuals whose leadership, service and unwavering commitment have shaped the health and well-being of communities. **Alan Witt** was named 2025 Citizen of the Year and **Dr. David Fitzgerald Jones** was named 2025 Provider of the Year. Witt has spent a lifetime strengthening institutions and advancing opportunities across the region. His legacy includes more than 20 years of service on the Riverside Health Board – 16 of those as Chair – where he guided major milestones including the construction of Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital in Onancock and the development of Riverside Doctors’ Hospital Williamsburg. He also played a key role in establishing RHS MedInsur, providing essential protection for health care professionals, and continues to serve on its board. Dr. Jones is a dedicated physician leader who has served the Eastern Shore community for more than 30 years. A board-certified specialist in internal medicine, pulmonary disease,



and critical care, he brings deep expertise and a strong sense of responsibility to his role. As a native of the Eastern Shore, Dr. Jones considers it a privilege to care for the community that shaped him. In addition to his clinical work, Dr. Jones was elected by his peers to serve as President of the **Riverside Medical Group Board**. Read more [here](#).



**Dr. Christopher Woleben, MD**, a pediatric emergency physician and Class of 1997 alum, has been named Associate Dean of Admissions for the **VCU School of Medicine**. He previously served as associate dean for student affairs, where he has guided thousands of students in their journey to residency. Dr. Woleben was nationally recognized with the AAMC Excellence in Medical Student Career Advising Award in 2021. And **Donna**

**Jackson, EdD**, a two-time VCU alum with more than two decades of experience in higher education, has been named Associate Dean of Admissions Outreach and Engagement for the **VCU School of Medicine**. Since 2023, Dr. Jackson has served as interim senior associate dean of admissions. Prior to her interim appointment she was assistant dean of admissions and director of student outreach programs.