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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 Hosts In-Person 'Earn While You Learn' Workshop for Virginia Hospitals

- This week, VHHA hosted an in-person workshop for hospitals seeking to fill allied health vacancies and meet evolving workforce needs through the innovative "Earn While You Learn" model. During the workshop, representatives from the **UVA Health** "Earn While You Learn" team delivered a presentation about their program designed to help fill a range of health care

roles from entry-level support positions to advanced clinical pathways, including allied health positions. Workshop participants learned how that model can be adapted and applied by other organizations in a tailored way to meet specific workforce needs. Contact VHHA Director of Workforce Initiatives **Sharon Alexander** at salexander@vhha.com with any questions and view event photos [here](#).

VHHA Hosts In-Person Meeting of Healthcare Safety & Security Workgroup

- This week, VHHA held a meeting of the **Healthcare Safety & Security Workgroup**. 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 with questions about the group.

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 Dec. 5 under an [extended deadline](#). 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 professionals 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 member hospitals or health systems are encouraged to contact VHHA President and CEO **Sean T. Connaughton** at sconnaughton@vhha.com to discuss this opportunity and the ways in which VHHA can support applicants.

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 is reflected in recent coverage from [Chief Healthcare Executive](#), [WRIC](#), [WSET](#), [Medical Buyer](#), [Brightgram](#), and [WJLA](#).

News Updates

Right to Work Repeal Legislation Pre-Filed Ahead of 2026 Virginia General Assembly Session

State **Senator Jennifer Carroll Foy** (D-Prince William County) has pre-filed [legislation](#) seeking to repeal Virginia's longstanding [right to work law](#) that prohibits compulsory union membership as a condition of employment. The legislation, Senate Bill 32, has been [referred](#) to the **Senate Commerce and Labor Committee** and will be pending there when the 2026 **Virginia General Assembly** session commences on Jan. 14. Repealing Virginia's right to work law has long been a goal for organized labor groups. It is opposed by business groups, including the [Keep Virginia Working](#) coalition that is encouraging Virginians

to contact state lawmakers to express opposition to the legislation on the grounds that repeal would harm individual freedom and undermine economic competitiveness in the Commonwealth. During the 2025 gubernatorial campaign, **Governor-elect Abigail Spanberger** [reportedly said](#) she did not support full repeal of the right to work law, while indicating that reforms to that policy may be appropriate in the future.

CMS Shares Guidance on Provider Tax Policy Changes Under OBBBA

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** has shared [preliminary guidance](#) with states regarding changes to provider tax policy under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) that **Congress** approved and **U.S. President Donald J. Trump** signed into law in July. Under the law, CMS will prohibit new health care-related taxes and associated financing practices that have been historically used to draw down federal matching funds. Provisions in OBBBA call for a series of multi-year rate reductions to the provider tax as well as multi-year reductions to Medicaid supplemental payment percentages through the state directed payment program (DPP). VHHA estimates those policy changes could cost Virginia hospitals more than \$2 billion in lost annual funding if fully implemented. Private acute care hospitals in Virginia pay a provider tax on net patient revenue. Proceeds from that levy are used to fund the state share of Medicaid expansion costs and to draw down federal matching dollars to enhance inadequate Medicaid reimbursements. The CMS guidance indicates that “revenues associated with tax waiver proposals that were pending on or submitted after July 4, 2025, will not be included in the new indirect hold harmless threshold. CMS will calculate thresholds associated with the tax structure in effect with the most recent waiver approval for the tax, and for which the state is actively collecting revenue.” The guidance also specifies state deadlines for adapting to some of the new requirements under the law and notes that a formal rulemaking process is to follow. Read more [here](#). In related news, CMS has also shared guidance documents on OBBBA policy changes related to Medicaid and CHIP provisions in the law as well as changes to DPP. Access those guidance documents through this [link](#).

FDA Investigating Botulism Outbreak Associated with Infant Formula Brand

Baby nutrition company **ByHeart** recently issued a [voluntary nationwide recall](#) including batches of ByHeart Whole Nutrition Infant Formula cans and Anywhere Pack™. Meanwhile, an investigation by the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** and the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** is underway into a multi-state outbreak of infant botulism illnesses. As of Nov. 14, 23 infants had suspected or confirmed botulism and confirmed exposure to ByHeart Whole Nutrition infant formula, according to the FDA. Cases have been reported by 13 states. So far, none of the cases have been linked to Virginia. Infant botulism is a rare but serious illness that occurs when *Clostridium botulinum* spores are ingested and then colonize the intestinal tract, producing *botulinum* neurotoxins in the immature gut of infants. Affected infants can present with the following signs and symptoms: constipation, poor feeding, ptosis (drooping eyelid), sluggish pupils, low muscle tone, difficulty sucking and swallowing, weak or altered cry, generalized weakness, respiratory difficulty, and possible respiratory arrest. Parents of young children experiencing any of these symptoms are urged to seek immediate medical attention. Read more [here](#). In a separate [letter](#) to clinicians on the subject, **Virginia State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen M. Shelton** advises providers to “consider infant botulism as a clinical diagnosis in any infant presenting with unexplained weakness, poor feeding, decreased head control, or difficulty swallowing — especially if the infant has consumed ByHeart formula.” The letter also instructs providers to “report all suspected cases immediately to your local health department” and to “arrange for consultation with the [Infant Botulism Treatment & Prevention Program \(IBTPP\)](#) at 510-231-7600 for evaluation and treatment guidance.” The letter further notes that “if clinical consultation supports infant botulism, begin

treatment with BabyBIG® without delay. Do not wait for laboratory confirmation to initiate case management. Early recognition and treatment are critical.”

Influenza Strain H3N2 Blamed for Outbreaks in U.K., Canada, Japan

Health officials in England are warning that the nation faces a [challenging winter ahead](#) amid a wave of [early influenza infections](#) that is leading to hospitalizations. Much of this activity is being attributed to a mutated flu strain, H3N2, that is also being [cited](#) in outbreaks impacting Canada and Japan. Additional information about influenza and flu strains is available from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) [here](#). In related news, the CDC [reports](#) that data shows influenza infections are growing in 39 states and COVID-19 infections are growing in 20 states.

ACA Marketplace Health Plan Enrollment Period for 2026 Coverage Open to the Public

The [enrollment period](#) for people to purchase 2026 health coverage plans on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) health insurance marketplace is open until Jan. 15, 2026. In 2025, nearly 389,000 Virginians enrolled in coverage through [Virginia’s Insurance Marketplace](#). What is different about this cycle is that the enrollment period is two weeks shorter than last year and fewer people may have access to financial support that helps subsidize the cost of purchasing coverage. For the past several years, enhanced premium tax credits (EPTC) approved by Congress have helped qualified individuals purchase coverage on the marketplace. Those EPTCs are set to expire at the end of this year if Congress doesn’t extend them. Anticipating EPTC expiration, health insurance companies that offer marketplace plans have proposed rate increases for plan year 2026 in Virginia and beyond. In August, the **Virginia State Corporation Commission** (SCC) [announced](#) that many health insurers offering individual and small group coverage marketplace plans have requested rate increases, with many proposing average increases of 20 percent or more. It has been projected that as many as one-fourth of the Virginians who now have marketplace plans could lose coverage if the enhanced premium tax credits expire. Nationally, an [analysis](#) by Peterson-KFF showed that “across 312 insurers participating in the ACA Marketplaces from the 50 states and the District of Columbia” there is “a median proposed premium increase of 18 percent.” The study indicates that is a sharp increase from last year and “the largest rate change insurers have requested since 2018.” The SCC also noted that insurers requested an average 11.2 percent rate increase for small group rates in 2026.

Medicare Annual Enrollment Period Active Through Dec. 7

The [Medicare open enrollment period](#) for 2026 recently began and continues through Dec. 7. During this period, eligible individuals can enroll or disenroll from Medicare Advantage plans, change drug plans, and more. Earlier this year, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) [indicated](#) that it anticipates premium and drug plan cost stability for 2026 coverage. In 2025, [CMS data](#) shows that of the 69 million Americans enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B, about 51 percent were in Medicare Advantage plans. VHHA has additional information about Medicare on its website, including official government documentation, and educational resources on plan feature comparison charts, frequently asked questions, and more. Visit this [link](#) to learn more and access the available resources.

Events

VHEMP to Host Dec. 17 Webinar with National Weather Service on Anticipated Winter Conditions

Registration is open for a **Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program (VHEMP)** winter weather briefing webinar with the **National Weather Service (NWS)** scheduled for Dec. 17 at noon. VHEMP is a partnership between the **Virginia Department of Health (VDH)**, the **Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA)** and the four Regional Healthcare Coalitions. The webinar will feature **Katie Carter**, Emergency Response Specialist with NWS, who will provide an overview of the upcoming winter weather season forecast from mid-December through March as well as resources available to prepare for and monitor events. Visit this [link](#) to register. After registration, attendees will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the webinar. An attendee guide can be viewed [here](#) and information about asking questions during the webinar is available through this [link](#).

Podcast

VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features CHoR Orthopedic Surgeon, New Scoliosis Surgical Technique

This episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features **Dr. Chester Sharps**, an orthopedic surgeon with **Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU**. He joins us to tell us about himself and his path to medicine, educate us about an innovative procedure known as vertebral body tethering, 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.



Around the State



Meador



Achilleos



Azazil



Head



Goodwin

The **Virginia Society of Health-System Pharmacists (VSHP)** recently honored **Kayla Meador**, Pharmacy Technician at **Carilion Clinic**, as Technician of the Year; **Maria Achilleos**, Inpatient Pharmacy Supervisor

at **Sentara Leigh Hospital**, as Pharmacist of the Year; **Shabnam Azazil** with **Inova**, as New Practitioner of the Year; **Emily Hand**, Clinical Pharmacy Manager at **Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital**, was presented with the Clinical Practice Award; and **Corey Goodwin**, a Pharmacist at **Carilion Clinic**, received the Clinical Practice Award. Read more [here](#).