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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:

### **Poll Results Show Virginians View Hospitals Favorably, Have Concerns About Insurance and Drug Costs**

- Virginians hold hospitals in high esteem and say that they and their families have had positive experiences when visiting hospitals for medical care. Overall, 81 percent of Virginia voters have a favorable opinion about Virginia hospitals and 82 percent report a positive personal experience as a patient or close family member of someone receiving hospital care, according to

a [recent statewide public opinion survey](#) from Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy. Those findings align with previous statewide poll results that show strongly positive views about Virginia hospitals. More broadly, they also underscore the many public health and economic contributions hospitals make in communities across the Commonwealth. Data shows that in 2024 Virginia hospitals generated \$68.8 billion in positive state economic activity, provided more than 130,000 direct jobs as top employers in many Virginia cities and counties, accommodated 4.45 million annual patient days and more than 813,000 inpatient admissions, and handled nearly 92 percent of voluntary and involuntary behavioral health inpatient admissions statewide. In recent years, Virginia hospitals have delivered more than 86,000 babies annually. In contrast to positive views about hospitals, Virginians hold strongly unfavorable opinions of health insurers (62 percent unfavorable compared to 34 percent favorable) and pharmaceutical companies (75 percent unfavorable compared to 18 percent favorable). When it comes to healthcare spending, voters cite out-of-pocket insurance costs such as co-pays and deductibles (32 percent), monthly insurance premiums (27 percent), and prescription drug costs (15 percent) as their top healthcare cost concerns. And when asked for their views on what is most responsible for rising healthcare costs, Virginians listed health insurance companies (35 percent), the government (21 percent), and drug companies (17 percent) among their top responses. In other results, the Mason-Dixon poll shows that Virginians want the U.S. Congress to extend tax credits currently available to help eligible individuals and families purchase health insurance plans by a 4-to-1 margin; one-fourth of voters (28 percent) say they have experienced a delay or denial of care recommended by a health care provider due to insurance prior authorization policies; support for Virginia's certificate of public need (COPN) remains strong with 68 percent of voters expressing support for keeping the current system in place compared to just 12 percent who want to eliminate COPN; by a substantial margin, Virginians support keeping the current medical malpractice damage award cap of \$2.65 million in place, with 51 percent supporting that position and another 27 percent expressing support for maintaining the cap with some increase to the cap amount; and there is strong support (81 percent) for preserving Virginia's right to work law, which bans requiring workers to be in a union as a condition of employment. The statewide results are based on a poll of 800 registered voters conducted Nov. 19-22, 2025 over live landline and cell phone interviews with Virginians from all regions of the Commonwealth. The polling sample reflects the ethnic, gender, age, geographic, and political diversity of Virginia. It is the latest in a series of surveys commissioned by the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) to help identify health care issues of concern to Virginians, better understand public sentiment about them, and to inform the Association's approach to public policy engagement. Read more [here](#).

### **VHEMP Hosts Webinar with National Weather Service on Anticipated Winter Conditions**

- The **Virginia Healthcare Emergency Management Program (VHEMP)** recently hosted a winter weather briefing webinar with the **National Weather Service (NWS)**. 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 featured **Katie Carter**, Emergency Response Specialist with NWS, who provided 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. View a webinar recording [here](#) and presentation slides through this [link](#).

### **VHHA Shares 2025 Holiday Video Card with Members**

- The holiday season is a time to be thankful for our blessings. Here at VHHA, we are grateful for the dedicated caregivers and health care professionals who work in hospitals across Virginia to help keep people healthy. To mark the season, VHHA recently shared its 2025 holiday video card to wish everyone a safe, happy, and healthy holiday season and a prosperous New Year. View the 2025 holiday video card [here](#).

### **VHHA Shares Video from 2025 Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Leaders Summit**

- VHHA recently released a [highlight video](#) that recaps sights and sounds from the **2025 Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Leaders Summit** held Nov. 5-7, 2025 at the Omni Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, VA. “Insight. Innovation. Impact.” was the theme of the Summit presented by the **Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA)** and the **VHHA Foundation**. View a Summit program brochure [here](#). View the awards luncheon program [here](#) and read more about the VHHA Outstanding Service Awards, including past winners, through this [link](#). Read more about the event [here](#) and view a Summit photo gallery through this [link](#).

## **News Updates**

### **Governor-Elect Spanberger Selects Veteran Legislator for Finance Secretary**

**Virginia Governor-Elect Abigail Spanberger** has nominated **Delegate Mark D. Sickles** of Fairfax County to serve as her Finance Secretary. Sickles has served for two decades in the **Virginia House of Delegates**. His legislative leadership roles include serving as Chair of the **House Health and Human Services Committee**, as **Vice Chair of the House Appropriations Committee**, and as a House state budget negotiator. VHHA staff has worked closely and collaboratively with Delegate Sickles over the years. The Secretary of Finance is a cabinet-level role in a gubernatorial administration with oversight of agencies that handle the Commonwealth’s financial transactions including collecting taxes, paying bills, and distributing aid to localities. The role involves forecasting and collecting revenues, managing the Commonwealth’s finances and investments, selling bonds, overseeing internal audits, developing strategic financial plans, and preparing and implementing the state budget.

### **White House Announces Drug Pricing Deals with More Pharmaceutical Firms**

**U.S. President Donald J. Trump** recently [announced](#) that his Administration has reached agreements with nine “major pharmaceutical companies to lower prescription drug prices for Americans” to levels consistent with most-favored-nation (MFN) pricing available in other developed nations. The deals are with these firms – Amgen, Bristol Myers Squibb, Boehringer Ingelheim, Genentech, Gilead Sciences, GSK, Merck, Novartis, and Sanofi – and they represent agreements to reduce prices on drugs that treat many costly and chronic conditions, including type two diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), hepatitis B and C, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and certain cancers, among others. According to the White House, the agreements will provide state Medicaid programs with MFN pricing on products by those companies, yielding substantial savings. The latest development follows previous drug pricing deals announced by the White House. In related news, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** recently announced two proposed rules. One would implement a new Medicare payment model called the [Global Benchmark for Efficient Drug Pricing Model](#) to test an alternative calculation for manufacturer rebates under the Medicare Part

B Inflation Rebate Program. The other is the [Guarding U.S. Medicare Against Rising Drug Costs Model](#). It would test an alternative payment method for calculating inflation rebates for certain Part D drugs and biological products. Public comments are being accepted on both through Feb. 23, 2026.

### **CMS Highlights MAHA ELEVATE Model with Funding Available for Wellness, Prevention Proposals**

Funding is expected to be available in 2026 to support multi-year wellness and prevention projects through the Make America Healthy Again: Enhancing Lifestyle and Evaluating Value-based Approaches Through Evidence (MAHA ELEVATE) model, according to the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS). The agency indicates that up to \$100 million will be available to fund 3-year cooperative agreements for up to 30 proposals that promote health and prevention for original Medicare beneficiaries. The proposals will utilize evidence-based, whole-person care approaches – including functional or lifestyle medicine interventions – that are not presently covered by original Medicare. These approaches are intended to support, not replace, the medical care received by people with Medicare. MAHA ELEVATE will gather and evaluate new data on cost and quality to inform future interventions promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors and ultimately reduce spending in original Medicare. CMS will release a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) in early 2026 for the first cohort, and the voluntary model will launch on Sept. 1, 2026. Read more [here](#).

### **Members of Congress Urge DOE to Remove Post-Graduate Nursing Degrees from Potential Loan Limits**

Dozens of members of the **U.S. Congress** have signed onto a recent [letter](#) to the **U.S. Department of Education** (DOE) regarding [draft regulations](#) that could impact the future ability of students to take out loans to pay for certain nursing, public health, social work, and allied health education programs. The proposed regulations would reclassify what qualifies as a “professional degree” for purposes of educational loan borrowing capacity. Under the draft proposal, nursing students would be capped at \$100,000 of borrowing rather than \$200,000 that is allowed for some professional programs. The draft regulations are an outgrowth from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act budget reconciliation package that was approved this year. The new policies on student loans are set to take effect July 1, 2026. If the draft regulations are implemented, they could impose a more restrictive cap on federal loans for students attending graduate programs in certain professions excluded from the definition of what qualifies as a “professional degree.” The regulations have not been finalized. The [expectation](#) is that the final rule will be released in spring 2026. In the letter to DOE, members of Congress who signed it cite current and projected future nursing workforce demand and shortages as part of the rationale for exempting nursing degree from the proposed rules.

### **U.S. Exceeds 2,000 Measles Cases in 2025, the Most in Decades**

According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC), [2,012 confirmed measles cases](#) have been reported in the U.S. in 2025, with the majority of those in 44 jurisdictions: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York City, New York state, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. There have been 50 outbreaks reported in 2025 and 87 percent of confirmed cases (1,760 of 2,012) are outbreak-associated. For comparison, 16 outbreaks were reported during 2024 and 69 percent of cases (198 of 285) were outbreak-associated. The **Center for Outbreak Response Innovation at John Hopkins University** [indicates](#) the current measles case count

is the highest U.S. number since 1992. View a North American data dashboard on 2025 measles cases [here](#). Measles is a highly contagious illness that can spread by airborne means. Its symptoms usually appear in two stages: first, an infected person may develop a fever of greater than 101 degrees and experience a runny nose, watery red eyes, and a cough from 7-14 days after being exposed; second is the appearance of a skin rash that can start 3-5 days after symptoms begin. People with measles are contagious from four days before the rash appears through four days after the rash appears. There have been four [confirmed measles cases](#) in Virginia this year.

## Events

### Save the Date for the 2026 Virginia Patient Safety Summit in February

Save the date for the **2026 Virginia Patient Safety Summit**, which will be held as a virtual event on Feb. 26, 2026. The Summit will highlight innovative work in Virginia and across the nation to advance a culture of safety and continuous improvement in health care with a focus on how shared values and behaviors can minimize errors, improve outcomes, and enhance the overall quality and experience of care. Beginning in 2026, the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** will require all U.S. hospitals participating in Medicare or Medicaid to attest to patient safety structural measures that assess strategies to strengthen systems for safety, including leadership commitment to eliminating preventable harm, supporting a culture of safety and learning health systems, accountability and transparency, and patient and family engagement. Registration for the Summit will open soon. The **VHHA Center for Healthcare Excellence** is hosting this event in partnership with the **Virginia Nurses Foundation**, the **Medical Society of Virginia**, the **Virginia Pharmacists Association**, and the **Virginia Society of Health-System Pharmacists**.

## Podcast

### VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features Sentara Health Leader, and Behavioral Health Crisis Team

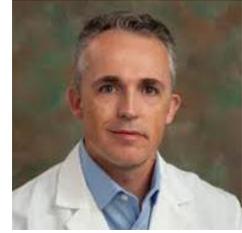
This episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features **Kirkpatrick "Kapua" Conley**, MHA, FACHE, Senior Vice President and Acute Care Market President for the **Sentara Health** Eastern Market. He joins us for a conversation about his work and professional journey, the Sentara's CARES team, 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



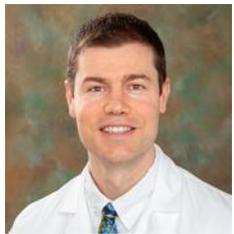
[pcfpodcast@vhha.com](mailto:pcfpodcast@vhha.com).

## Around the State

**Twin County Regional Healthcare**, a **Lifepoint Health** facility, has announced that **Dr. Billy Turner, DO**, an Internal Medicine Hospitalist, is its Physician of the Year. This honor, voted on by peers, recognizes Dr. Turner's exceptional dedication to patient care, compassion, and commitment to his community. Read more [here](#).



**Clinch Valley Health**, a **Lifepoint Health** facility, has named **Dr. Vijay Ramakrishnan** as its 2025 Provider of the Year for his compassionate, high-quality care and his unwavering commitment to patients. Dr. Ramakrishnan serves as a radiologist at Clinch Valley Health. He is also a past guest on VHHA's *Patients Come First* [podcast](#). Dr. Ramakrishnan earned his medical degree from Eastern Virginia Medical School. He is a board-certified Diagnostic and Interventional radiologist having completed residency at Bridgeport Hospital in Connecticut and fellowship at New York University. Dr. Ramakrishnan joined Clinch Valley Health in 2011.



**Roanoke City Council** recently named **Dr. Robert Brown**, an emergency medicine physician with **Carilion Clinic**, as its 2025 Citizen of the Year in recognition of his "exemplary service in emergency medicine, unwavering commitment to the health and wellbeing of Roanoke residents, and extraordinary devotion to the city's underserved communities." Dr. Brown is a graduate of the charter class of the **Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine** who chose to remain in the Roanoke Valley to build his career and life. He also volunteers regularly at the Bradley Free Clinic, serving uninsured and underinsured patients as a primary care physician. Read more [here](#).

**Dr. Karen Hendricks-Muñoz, MD, MPH**, has been selected as Physician-In-Chief of **Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU** and chair of the Department of Pediatrics at **VCU School of Medicine**. Dr. Hendricks-Muñoz has been serving in this role in an interim capacity since Oct. 31, 2024, in addition to fulfilling her roles as the William Tate Graham Endowed Chair in Neonatal Medicine, professor of Pediatrics and Program Director of the Neonatal Medicine Fellowship Training Program. Dr. Hendricks-Muñoz came to CHoR in 2012 as an expert clinician and national leader in neonatal medicine, pediatric research, and education. Read more [here](#).



The Project ADAM team at **Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU** has received the 2025 President's Award from the Virginia Association of School Nurses. Project ADAM (Automated Defibrillation in Adam's Memory) is a national non-profit committed to saving lives through advocacy, education, preparedness and collaboration. Read more [here](#).