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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 11th Annual Allied Health Care Summit

- This week, VHHA hosted the **11th Annual Allied Health Care Summit** at VHHA offices in Glen Allen, VA. The Summit brought together health care leaders and advocates from a variety of

organizations for a conversation about policy priorities for the upcoming 2026 **Virginia General Assembly** session. View event photos [here](#).

VHHA Hosts Legislative Briefing for Hospital Physician, Nurse Leaders

- This week, the **VHHA Government Relations Team** provided a virtual briefing for Virginia hospital physician and nurse leaders regarding the 2026 **Virginia General Assembly** session. The upcoming legislative session is scheduled for 60 days and is set to begin on Jan. 14. In addition to a new session, Virginia will also have new leadership in 2026 following the November elections in which voters selected **Governor-elect Abigail Spanberger**, **Lieutenant Governor-elect Ghazala Hashmi**, and **Attorney General-elect Jay Jones** to serve four-year terms as statewide office holders. Based on those results, and the outcome of elections for all 100 seats in the **Virginia House of Delegates**, Democrats enter 2026 with control of the Commonwealth's executive and legislative branches. That dynamic, as well as broader economic conditions, may influence some of the state budgetary and policy actions. During the briefing coordinated by the **VHHA Quality and Patient Safety Team**, VHHA staff provided an overview of the current climate and potential policy implications moving forward. Contact **Abraham Segres** at asegres@vhha.com with questions.

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 through today (Friday, 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.

News Updates

HHS Modifies Nursing Home Minimum Staffing Standard Rule

This week, the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) [announced](#) the repeal of certain provisions of a federal rule on Minimum Staffing Standards for Long-Term Care Facilities. A [2024 rule](#) from the Biden Administration established a requirement that nursing homes participating in Medicare and Medicaid provide residents with a minimum total of 3.48 hours of nursing care per day. That included at least 0.55 hours from a registered nurse per resident per day, 2.45 hours from a nurse aide per resident per day, and requirements that each facility have a registered nurse onsite round-the-clock. The Trump Administration is repealing those provisions on the grounds that they “disproportionately

burdened facilities, especially those serving rural and Tribal communities, and jeopardized patient's access to care."

Governor-elect Spanberger Selects Health and Human Resources Secretary

Virginia Governor-elect Abigail Spanberger has selected **Marvin B. Figueroa** as her nominee for state Health and Human Resources (HHR) Secretary. His nomination is the first to be announced by the Spanberger Transition Team. Figueroa is currently a Vice President at [BGR Group](#). His previous experience includes roles with the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**, as Deputy HHR Secretary under former **Governor Ralph Northam**, and as Health Policy Advisor to **U.S. Senator Mark Warner**. Under the [law](#), the HHR Secretary has oversight responsibility for these Virginia state agencies: the Department of Health, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, the Department of Health Professions, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, the Office of Children's Services, the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority, and the Opioid Abatement Authority. In Virginia, gubernatorial cabinet secretary nominees are subject to confirmation by the **General Assembly**.

New Chairs Named for Senate Education and Health, Rehabilitation and Social Services Committees

This week, the **Virginia Senate Democratic Caucus** announced that **Senator Barbara Favola** of Arlington County will serve as Chair of the **Senate Education and Health Committee** and **Senator Schuyler VanValkenburg** of Henrico County will serve as Chair of the **Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee**. Both committees are often forums for consideration of legislation of interest to the health care community. Favola, who has served as Chair of the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee, is moving to Chair the Senate Education and Health Committee due to the departure of **Lieutenant Governor-elect Ghazala Hashmi**, who previously chaired that committee.

CMS Releases Proposed Rule on Medicare Advantage, Part D for 2027

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** recently shared a [proposed rule](#) on Medicare Advantage (MA) and Part D program policies for 2027 that proposes changes to the quality measurement programs and health plan marketing practices. It also includes requests for information on potential MA program changes to the risk adjustment and quality bonus payment systems and oversight of chronic condition special needs plans for dual-eligible beneficiaries, among other provisions. Public comment on the proposed rule is being accepted through Jan. 26, 2026. In other news CMS recently announced that it has [identified](#) 15 drugs used to treat cancer, diabetes, asthma, and other chronic illnesses that will be subject to discounts for Medicare beneficiaries beginning in 2027. Under the [Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program](#), which was [established under the Inflation Reduction Act of 2002](#), CMS can directly negotiate the prices of certain high expenditure, single source drugs without generic or biosimilar competition. In the latest cycle, CMS indicates negotiations focused on drugs that represent some of the highest Medicare Part D spending. Read more about the program and the 15 drugs with negotiated discounts [here](#) and [here](#). And CMS recently issued notices announcing the [outpatient](#) and [inpatient](#) hospital deductible and the hospital and extended care services coinsurance amounts for services furnished in calendar year (CY) 2026 under Medicare's Hospital Insurance Program (Medicare Part A) and Medicare Part B. The current [Medicare enrollment period](#) for

2026 is open until Dec. 7. During this period, eligible individuals can enroll or disenroll from Medicare Advantage plans, change drug plans, and more.

CMS Issues 2026 Final Rule on Home Health Prospective Payment System

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** recently issued the home health prospective payment system [final rule](#) for calendar year (CY) 2026. It will reduce payments by 1.3 percent, or \$220 million relative to CY 2025, including a 3.2 percent market basket update. The final rule also includes a 3.6 percent budget neutrality cut CMS deems necessary due to the transition to the Patient-driven Groupings Model. In other news, CMS recently released the calendar year (CY) 2026 [final rule](#) that revises the Medicare Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS) and the Medicare Ambulatory Surgical Center (ASC) payment system. The final rule increases the Medicare hospital OPPS rates by 2.6 percent compared to 2025, which includes a 3.3 percent market basket update.

FDA Approves Gene Therapy for Spinal Muscular Atrophy

The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** recently approved a gene therapy treatment for spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) in adult and pediatric patients 2 and older with confirmed mutation in the survival motor neuron 1 (SMN1) gene. The approved treatment, Ivisma (onasemnogene abeparvovec-brve), is an adeno-associated virus (AAV) vector-based gene therapy. SMA is an autosomal-recessive neurodegenerative disorder caused by mutations in the SMN1 gene, characterized by irreversible and progressive motor neuron loss, leading to progressive muscle atrophy and weakness, and subsequent paralysis and death in the most severe cases. The SMA incidence rate is 4-10 per 10,000 live births. SMA previously was considered one of the leading causes of infant mortality in the U.S. due to genetic disease prior to effective treatments becoming available. Read more [here](#).

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.

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](#).

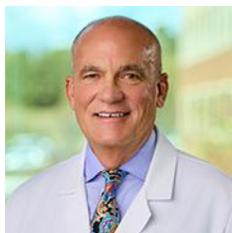
Podcast

VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features UVA Health Clinical Psychologist on Seasonal Affective Disorder

This episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features **Dr. Kim Penberthy**, a clinical psychologist and professor at the **UVA School of Medicine**. Dr. Penberthy is a researcher, professor, and innovator who joins us for a conversation about her work, the condition known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, and tips for those impacted by it. 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



Dr. Herb Ladley, a physician with **Ballad Health's CVA Heart Institute** and Chief Medical Officer for Wise, Dickenson, and Lee counties, has been named a 2025 Servant's Heart Award winner. Dr. Ladley became a cardiologist because he was captivated by the heart's anatomy and physiology. He joined the Heart Institute in 1984. To bring health care to more rural areas, he travels to Ballad Health CVA Heart Institute clinics in Pennington Gap and Norton, and he also sees patients at the Heart Center in Kingsport, TN, which he helped establish in 1999. Dr. Ladley loves the relationships he has built with his patients through the decades, and he always takes time to listen to his patients to understand how best to treat them. Read more [here](#).

Dr. Elizabeth Jackson, an accomplished general surgeon and physician leader, has been selected to serve as Chief Medical Officer of **Ballad Health's Johnson City Medical Center**. Dr. Jackson begins her new role on Dec. 8. She has served as chief medical officer for Holston Valley Medical Center and Indian Path Community Hospital for the past four years, while also serving as medical director of surgical services at Ballad Health and as chairperson of the Ballad Health Clinical Council. Dr. Jackson is a graduate of Milligan College and earned her medical degree from East Tennessee State University Quillen College of Medicine, where she also completed her surgical residency. She also holds a certified physician executive degree.



Aubrey Layne, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer for **Sentara Health**, recently received the 2025 Darden Award for Regional Leadership by the CIVIC Leadership Institute. He has also been recognized with an Icon Honors Award from *Virginia Business* that celebrates leaders over the age of 60 whose track records of success, visionary leadership, and commitment to excellence have left a lasting impact on their organizations and their communities, inspiring generations to come.

Josh Hammond has been named President of **VCU Health Tappahannock Hospital**, effective Dec. 7. He has been serving as the hospital's interim leader since June. As president of the **VCU Health** hospital serving Tappahannock and the Northern Neck region of Virginia, Hammond will be responsible for managing day-to-day operations and clinical services, while leading strategic initiatives aligned with the mission and vision of VCU Health. He previously served as associate vice president for ambulatory operations for VCU Health where he was responsible for health system access improvement initiatives, leading the ambulatory capacity management team and new site development, among other duties. Before joining VCU Health, Hammond held multiple leadership roles with **Sentara Health** in Virginia and North Carolina. Hammond follows Liz Martin, who retired in June 2025. Read more [here](#).



Monica Baskin, PhD, professor in the Department of Internal Medicine and Deputy Director of Research for **VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center**, has been selected to serve as a member of the Board of Directors for the **Association of American Medical Colleges**. She is one of nine at-large members of the board whose term will run until November 2026.

