



**Statement for the Record Submitted by the
Association of American Medical Colleges to the
House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means:
“Enhancing Access to Care at Home in Rural and
Underserved Communities”
Submitted March 12, 2024**

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the House Committee on Ways and Means March 12 hearing, “Enhancing Access to Care at Home in Rural and Underserved Communities.” The AAMC applauds the Committee for focusing on the tremendous potential of care at home to improve the lives of patients in our nation’s rural and underserved communities.

AAMC-member teaching hospitals and health systems, medical schools, and faculty physicians have long been at the forefront of innovative care delivery. The COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), though incredibly challenging for our members, proved to be an opportunity to enhance delivery in new care settings – especially the home. Our members rapidly expanded their existing telehealth capabilities, ensuring that patients could still access their providers despite restrictions on their ability to see their physicians in person. Many of our members also invested in Acute Hospital Care at Home (AHCaH) programs, which proved to not only help alleviate pressing capacity issues but also accelerate the development and implementation of more home-based care options. The AAMC believes that telehealth and AHCaH are integral to enhancing access to care in rural and underserved communities, and we urge you to refer to [our Oct. 4, 2023 response](#) to the Committee’s request for information on “Improving Access to Health Care in Rural and Underserved Areas.”

The AAMC is a nonprofit association dedicated to improving the health of people everywhere through medical education, health care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 158 U.S. medical schools accredited by the [Liaison Committee on Medical Education](#); 13 accredited Canadian medical schools; approximately 400 academic health systems and teaching hospitals, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America’s medical schools, academic health systems and teaching hospitals, and the millions of individuals across academic medicine, including more than 193,000 full-time faculty members, 96,000 medical students, 153,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. Following a 2022 merger, the Alliance of Academic Health Centers and the Alliance of Academic Health Centers International broadened participation in the AAMC by U.S. and international academic health centers.

The Acute Hospital Care at Home (AHCaH) Program and Academic Medicine

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) launched the Hospital Without Walls program in March 2020 to allow hospitals to provide services beyond their existing walls to help

address the need to expand care capacity and to develop sites dedicated to COVID-19 treatment. AHCaH was implemented as an expansion of this initiative that provides eligible hospitals the regulatory flexibility to treat certain patients, who would otherwise be admitted to the hospital, in their homes and for those hospitals to receive Medicare payment under the Inpatient Prospective Payment System for those patients.

The AHCaH program launched with six health care systems that had experience with providing acute hospital care in a patient’s home. To date, 315 hospitals across 131 health systems located in 37 states – including many teaching health systems and hospitals – have received waivers from CMS to participate in the program.¹ The increase in hospital participation underscores the critical need for continued flexibility to meet the health care needs of certain patients without having to admit them into the inpatient setting. Though the COVID-19 PHE is no longer in effect, teaching hospitals and health systems continue to expand their existing AHCaH programs, and additional hospitals are applying for the waiver now. Teaching hospitals routinely experience capacity challenges by virtue of their roles as safety net providers and AHCaH programs are a valuable resource to both alleviate capacity issues and provide patients access to care in the comfort of their home.

Advancements in Patient Care, Safety, and Outcomes

AAMC member teaching health systems and hospitals report positive outcomes and high patient satisfaction from their AHCaH patients and families. Analysis from studies on AHCaH programs reveal that the program can also lower the cost of care as well as reduce the number of hospital readmissions.² There exist also scenarios where patients with both uncomplicated and complex conditions alike benefit greatly from being in their homes. As a result of the numerous successes and tremendous potential, our members have made robust investments in their AHCaH programs with some considering their programs as a long-term solution to ongoing capacity concerns.

Participating hospitals are required to regularly report data that include key measures such as patient volume, unanticipated mortality, escalation rate, details about the institution’s safety committee, and the patient list. CMS has established parameters around the program to emphasize patient safety. A recent analysis of data on the program has indicated that patients treated under AHCaH had a low morality rate and minimal complications.³

Extending AHCAH

AAMC teaching health systems and hospitals view AHCaH as a way to transform care to meet patients’ needs. However, our members and their patients face uncertainty regarding the future of the program due to its pending expiration. For investments in AHCaH programs to continue and for more patients to be able to access this type of care, hospitals need certainty that the program

¹ <https://qualitynet.cms.gov/acute-hospital-care-at-home/resources>

² <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/innovation/hospital-homesm-care-reduces-costs-readmissions-and-complications-and-enhances>

³ Adams D, Wolfe AJ, Warren J, et al. Initial Findings From an Acute Hospital Care at Home Waiver Initiative. *JAMA Health Forum*. 2023;4(11):e233667. doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.3667

will continue for a significant period of time. A longer extension of the program, and the certainty that it brings will spur additional innovations in the program.

Congress extended the AHCaH program until December 31, 2024 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328). The AAMC supported the extension efforts, and urges the Committee to consider legislation that would extend the program once more. It is crucial for teaching health systems and hospitals to have certainty in the continuity of this program, particularly as they continue to make investments to expand and improve their AHCaH programs. We urge you to work on the extension of this program well before the December 31 deadline and to eliminate the uncertainty hospitals and health systems will undoubtedly face if Congress fails to act in a timely fashion.

Conclusion

The AAMC applauds the Committee for highlighting the importance of home-based care, and we urge you to pass legislation to extend the COVID-19 telehealth waivers and the AHCaH program to improve access to care and so that patients everywhere can continue to benefit.