



AHA TODAY

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Today's News: AHA Releases 2021 Advocacy Agenda; NASEM Issues Guidance on Communicating about COVID-19 Vaccines

AHA releases 2021 Advocacy Agenda. The AHA today released its [2021 Advocacy Agenda](#), a forward-looking document designed to positively influence the public policy environment for patients, communities and the health care field.

Hospitals and health systems — along with our doctors, nurses and other team members — have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, working tirelessly to provide the best care for patients, families and communities. Our joint focus with the new Congress and Administration is on providing relief, ensuring a smooth recovery and rebuilding a better health care system for the future. In addition, we need to address ongoing challenges that have been further exacerbated during the pandemic, including issues related to health equity, workforce resilience and behavioral health.

The document lays out priorities in six areas:

- Supporting the fight against COVID-19
- Advancing affordability in health care
- Sustaining the gains in health coverage
- Protecting patients' access to care
- Advancing health system transformation
- Enhancing quality, patient safety and equity

The AHA will continue to work hand in hand with our members; the state, regional and metropolitan hospital associations; national health care organizations; and other stakeholders to develop and implement an advocacy strategy to fulfill our vision of a society of healthy communities, where all individuals reach their highest potential for health.

NASEM releases guidance on communicating about COVID-19 vaccines. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine today released [guidance](#) on communication strategies to combat mistrust and build confidence in COVID-19 vaccines based on research on decision making, changing beliefs/attitudes, and reaching and engaging diverse audiences. The report recommends focusing communications on those who are skeptical or hesitant rather than firmly opposed to vaccination; tailoring messages to specific audiences; adapting messaging as circumstances change; and using trusted messengers with roots in the community to overcome mistrust and build confidence, among other strategies.

“Everyone — employers, health care providers, faith leaders, elected leaders, and public health

officials — has a role to play,” the authors say. “All strategies for increasing vaccine confidence need to take into account that vaccine decision making is part of a nuanced ecological model in which individual beliefs and behaviors are influenced by experiences at the community, organizational, and policy levels.”

AHA Pathways to Recovery podcast: Rural Montana leaders rising to the occasion. Four health care leaders in rural Montana discuss how their organizations are adjusting their internal operations to accommodate COVID-19 patients; rallying their communities together and building new relationships; and rebuilding on the path forward. [Listen here.](#)

Spotlight: UnityPoint’s AHA/BCBSIL-supported program for identifying, eliminating racial disparities in maternal and child health. With help from a health equity grant collaboration between the AHA’s Institute for Diversity and Health Equity and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, UnityPoint launched its CenteringPregnancy Care to Mitigate Racial Disparities Program. The evidence-based, prenatal care and peer support program aims to lower rates of preterm and low-birthweight babies. The program also aims to encourage infant breastfeeding and reduce the rate of neonatal intensive care unit admissions. In this month’s Spotlight Feature interview, Kari Beth Watts, D.O., at UnityPoint Health, discusses the program’s roots and goal of improving overall maternal and child health. [Read more.](#)

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