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## Articles:

1. [VHHA in Action](#)
2. [Thousands of Bills Filed, Rural Health Committee Formed as General Assembly Ends First Full Week](#)
3. [Register for 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit in February](#)
4. [VHI Publishes Health Plan Data Dashboard to Promote Transparency for Consumers](#)
5. [American Red Cross Announces Emergency Blood Shortage, Seeks Donors](#)
6. [VHHA Patients Come First Podcast Features VCU Health Physician Treating Sickle Cell Disease](#)
7. [Register for 2024 Regional Human Trafficking Summit in Richmond](#)
8. [HHS Final Rule Rescinds Previously Broadened Abortion 'Conscience' Objections in Health Care](#)
9. [Register for Upcoming Webinars on Chronic Care Management, Patient Affordability Gap](#)
10. [Around the State](#)

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## 1. 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, here are some developments of interest to Virginia hospitals and health systems:

- This week, VHHA held a legislative briefing call for its **Board of Directors** – the first of the current legislative session – and convened a meeting of the **Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Advocacy Committee** (VHHAC) for discussions about pending legislation, policy, and budgetary issues before the **Virginia General Assembly**.
- VHHA held a meeting of the **Payor Advisory Committee** this week. The Committee is a forum for hospital payor relations and revenue cycle leaders to discuss priority issues and ongoing payor-related challenges.
- VHHA staff monitored the **Virginia Health Information** (VHI) Board meeting this week, which featured discussion of health care-related legislative proposals pending in the **Virginia General Assembly**.
- VHHA is hosting the **2024 Hospital Lobby Day** at the Virginia General Assembly from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 24. Participants will have an opportunity to observe and engage with the legislative process by speaking to lawmakers and sharing their firsthand perspective in health care. Visit this [link](#) to register.
- The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) has updated [guidance](#) for the use of the monoclonal antibody nirsevimab to prevent severe respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in young children due to an expected increase in supply from manufacturers.
- The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS), the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS), and the CDC have issued a final rule updating Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) fees and clarifying CLIA regulations. The final rule implements

a biennial two-part increase of CLIA fees, and it finalizes the incorporation of limited/specific laboratory fees, including fees for follow-up surveys, substantiated complaint surveys, and revised certificates. The rule also finalizes the distribution of the administrative overhead costs of test complexity determination for waived tests and test systems with a nominal increase in Certificate of Waiver (CoW) fees. And it finalizes the clarification of the methodology used to determine program compliance fees. Read more [here](#).

- The **Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services** (DMAS) has notified health care providers and managed care organizations (MCO) that as of Jan. 1 the agency is implementing 12-month continuous eligibility for children younger than 19 in Medicaid and Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS), in accordance with a federal mandate that requires states to provide 12 months of continuous eligibility for children under age 19 in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) (called FAMIS in Virginia), with limited exceptions. Continuous eligibility means the child remains enrolled for a protected 12-month period, during which their coverage cannot be reduced or terminated regardless of changes in circumstance. Read more [here](#).
- The **Virginia Department of Health** (VDH) is hosting a series of educational training sessions for health care providers regarding updated information and lessons learned from the 2022-2023 Mpx outbreak. The sessions will highlight the epidemiology of the outbreak and the risk of reemergence, prevention and control strategies, and vaccination and communication strategies. Four sessions are scheduled, and each will be held from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on the following dates and locations: Fairfax VDOT on Jan. 23, Double Tree Hotel Charlottesville on Jan. 31, Wytheville Community College on Feb. 8, and the Hyatt Place Chesapeake on Feb. 14. Information about continuing education credit available to participants can be viewed online [here](#). Registration is required through this [link](#).
- Virginia hospitals and health systems provided \$3.3 billion in community support to the Commonwealth in 2022 and generated more than \$64 billion in positive economic activity across the state, according to the recently released [2024 Annual Report on Community Benefit](#) from VHHA. Hospitals are available 24/7/365 to provide emergent and acute medical treatment and care to people in need. Virginia hospitals serve as essential providers of health care services and economic anchors for communities throughout the Commonwealth. Among other items, that includes: \$1.2 billion in government payment shortfalls due to the difference between Medicare reimbursements and the actual cost of care; \$358 million in charity care, which includes the cost of free and discounted care to serve individuals who cannot afford to pay for care; \$228 million for means-tested programs and subsidized health services, and \$354 million in bad debt for services not paid in full by a patient or third-party payer; \$573 million to cover the state share of Medicaid expansion costs enabling hundreds of thousands of Virginians to gain health care coverage; and \$201 million in community health investments. The data shows that hospitals provided more than \$3.3 billion in community support in the form of uncompensated care, community investments, taxes, and more. Virginia hospitals also directly employ more than 124,400 people in good jobs, accounting for \$12.7 billion in wages and benefits, and hospitals’ presence support 337,000 additional skilled jobs in the state. Virginia hospitals in 2022 made those abundant contributions while also handling the vast majority (91.8 percent) of total state voluntary and involuntary behavioral health inpatient hospital admissions, accommodating 3.3 million emergency department visits, accepting more than 741,200 inpatient admissions (accounting for 4.3 million patient days), delivering more than 88,000 babies. See an interactive Community Benefit tool [here](#) and read the full report [here](#).
- The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) is advising health care providers not to “purchase or implant the currently available Synovo Total Hip System” manufactured by Synovo

Production, Inc. (Synovo) because three system components – the Femoral Resurfacing Cup, the Acetabular Fixation Cup, and the Acetabular Bearing – have been significantly modified from the devices that were previously cleared by the FDA. The agency also advised providers to remove the system and the components used from the system from their inventory. At this point, the FDA has not recommended removing the Synovo Total Hip Systems from patients who do not have any new or worsening pain or symptoms. Providers are advised to “be aware that safety and effectiveness have not been established for the Femoral Resurfacing Cup, the Acetabular Fixation Cup, and the Acetabular Bearing used in the Synovo Total Hip System” and to “monitor patients who have the Synovo Total Hip System, including resurfacing implants, for potential bone loss or device loosening, wear or failure.” This may include patient imaging to evaluate an implanted device if a provider suspects device failure. Providers are encouraged to discuss a range of available treatment options for patients considering hip replacement. The Synovo Total Hip System is also referred to as the Total Hip Replacement System, and also as Synovo Preserve and Endotec BP. Read more [here](#).

- Certificate of Public Need (COPN) application fees are set to increase under a [new fee schedule approved in December](#) by the **Virginia State Board of Health**. COPN application fees were last changed by the **Virginia General Assembly** in 1996. Regulations adopted by the Board call for the COPN application fee to increase from 1 percent to 1.5 percent “of the total capital expenditure” for a project, an increase in the “minimum and maximum fee caps to \$1,600 (raised from \$1,000) and \$44,000 (up from \$20,000),” and a “\$70 registration fee for certain capital expenditures and medical equipment and services.” This regulatory action follows previous work on promulgation of a COPN fee schedule that proposed a three-fold increase to the maximum fee (up to \$60,000) with no increase to the minimum fee or other adjustments. At the request of VHHA and other stakeholders, those proposed regulations were [withdrawn](#) in 2022 pending further work to develop a revised proposal addressing concerns about the initial version proffered. The current proposed fee schedule, which seeks to smooth over fee increases across all applicants, is now pending Executive Branch review prior to publication on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall website for a public comment period. The regulations will be effective 15 days following the conclusion of the public comment period.
- The **Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC)** has updated its website to provide resources for health care providers who submit complaints alleging insurer noncompliance with applicable laws and regulations. Under the [law](#), the SCC **Bureau of Insurance (BOI)** investigates all complaints and, following subsequent investigations, reports its findings and any resulting action to the complainants. The provider complaint procedures can be accessed online [here](#) under the “File Your Complaint/Appeal by Mail or Fax (Complaint Forms)” section.
- 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 includes recent coverage from [WVEC](#), [WAVY](#), the [Culpeper Star Exponent](#), and [WVTF](#).

[Back](#)

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## 2. Thousands of Bills Filed, Rural Health Committee Formed as General Assembly Ends First Full Week

This is the first full week of the **Virginia General Assembly 2024** legislative session and more than [2,200 pieces of legislation](#) have been filed so far. Today (Friday, Jan. 19) is the bill filing deadline so that number may yet increase. Already, bills have been filed on certificate of public need (COPN) deregulation, behavioral health policy, health care price transparency, workplace violence protections, medical debt collection, clinician practice authority, pharmacy operations, and more. In addition to

those topics, **House of Delegates Speaker Don Scott** (D-Portsmouth) recently established a **Select Committee on Advancing Rural and Small Town Health Care**. The committee will be comprised of 12 members from the House of Delegates with a directive to make “five actionable recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly” in 2025 to help address the unique socioeconomic, community health, access, and workforce staffing challenges impacting rural communities.” Read a letter regarding the formation of the committee [here](#). The budget writing process is also on the legislative agenda this year. As with legislative proposals, lawmakers are submitting proposed amendments to Virginia’s biennial budget covering a two-year period starting July 1, 2024. VHHA is supporting budget proposals to strengthen the behavioral health care system and enhance health care workforce development, among other initiatives. The VHHA Government Affairs team is stationed at the State Capitol throughout the session to engage with members of the legislature and the Administration of **Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin** in support of the interests of hospitals and health systems. The 2024 session is one of the “long” 60-day sessions that occur in even years. During the session, Virginia legislators will craft a biennial budget to set state fiscal policy for a two-year period beginning on July 1, 2024. – Julie Dime

[Back](#)

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### 3. Register for 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit in February

Register now for the **2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit**, which will be held as a virtual event on Feb. 22, 2024 from 9:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m. Having an innovative mindset in health care is in high demand right now. Health care delivery innovation is necessary to find new ways to improve quality, enhance the patient experience, expand safety initiatives, increase efficiency, and reduce costs. As hospitals and health systems pursue innovative solutions in all aspects of their care delivery and quality and safety improvement efforts, they are making real strides toward what the industry refers to as “quadruple aim” – higher quality of patient care with improved and equitable outcomes, increased value for both the patient and provider, improved patient satisfaction and an improved care provider experience. The 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit will highlight the progress being made in that regard in Virginia and across the nation. Keynote speakers for the 2024 Summit include: **Dr. Aditi Mallick**, the Acting Director of the **CMS Office of Minority Health**, and **Bonnie Clipper**, DNP, MA, MBA, RN, CENP, FACHE, FAAN, an internationally recognized nurse futurist and nursing innovation expert. Registration for the 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit is free for staff and providers associated with Virginia hospitals and health systems, members of Virginia Patient Safety Summit partner organizations (Medical Society of Virginia, the Virginia Nurses Association, and the Virginia Pharmacists Association), federal and state health partner organizations and event sponsor organizations and students. Others may register for a fee of \$95. Visit this [link](#) for more details and event registration. To register, you may need to reset your password or create a new one (if you do not already have an account). Contact [events@vhha.com](mailto:events@vhha.com) if you encounter trouble registering an account or creating a new password. – Abraham Segres and Kristie Burnette

[Back](#)

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### 4. VHI Publishes Health Plan Data Dashboard to Promote Transparency for Consumers

**Virginia Health Information** (VHI) has published an [interactive data dashboard](#) on health insurance costs and transparency. The dashboard is the result of [legislation](#) approved by the **Virginia General Assembly** in 2022 that requires the **Virginia Department of Health** (VDH), in consultation with the **Virginia State Corporation Commission’s** (SCC) **Bureau of Insurance** (BOI), to establish a methodology for evaluating health insurance carrier and managed care organization plans with the goal of enhancing transparency

and competition among insurance carriers to support consumers in making coverage decisions. Stakeholders including BOI, VDH, VHI, the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association, the Virginia Association of Health Plans, and the Medical Society of Virginia, among others, participated in the work of developing the methodology and identifying data sources for the dashboard. – Craig Connors

[Back](#)

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## 5. American Red Cross Announces Emergency Blood Shortage, Seeks Donors

The **American Red Cross** recently [announced](#) an emergency blood shortage and urged Americans to donate blood or platelets to address the shortage so lifesaving medical procedures may proceed without delay. Blood donations to the Red Cross have decreased 40 percent in the past 20 years, the organization noted. To encourage donations this January during National Blood Donor Month, the Red Cross and National Football League have partnered to offer donors a [chance to win a trip for two to the Super Bowl](#).

[Back](#)

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## 6. VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features VCU Health Physician Treating Sickle Cell Disease

The latest episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features an interview with **Dr. Wally Smith**, a physician at **VCU Health** who specializes in the treatment of Sickle Cell Disease. He joins us for a conversation about his path to medicine, his work, promising new gene therapy treatments for the disease, 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](#), [Google Podcasts](#), [Stitcher](#), [Tuneln](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Blubrry](#), [iHeart Radio](#), [Deezer](#), [Podbay](#), [Overcast](#), [Pocket Casts](#), the [Virginia Audio Collective](#), the [Public Health Podcast Network](#), the [World Podcast Network](#), and the [Family Podcast Network](#). The podcast can also be heard on the radio airwaves – episodes air each Saturday at noon and Sunday at 10 a.m. on 100.5 FM, 107.7 FM, 92.7 FM, and 820 AM across Central Virginia and 1650 AM in Hampton Roads, and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. on 93.9 FM in Richmond. Send questions, comments, feedback, or guest suggestions to [pcfpodcast@vhha.com](mailto:pcfpodcast@vhha.com). – Will Selden

[Back](#)

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## 7. Register for 2024 Regional Human Trafficking Summit in Richmond

Register now for the fourth annual Regional Human Trafficking Summit hosted by the **Regional Interdisciplinary Collaborative Working to Disrupt Human Trafficking** (RIC), a multi-state non-profit group that brings together academics, advocates, caregivers, clinicians, law enforcement, survivors, and other stakeholders who are working to end human trafficking. The theme of the Summit, which is scheduled for Feb. 7-8, 2024 at the **VCU School of Medicine**, is "Expanding Community Partnerships to Address Human Trafficking." Registration is available through this [link](#) and information about sponsorship opportunities is available [here](#).

[Back](#)

---

## 8. HHS Final Rule Rescinds Previously Broadened Abortion 'Conscience' Objections in Health Care

The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) has issued a [final rule](#) that rolls back an earlier rule providing greater latitude to health care workers who declined to medically terminate

pregnancies due to religious or moral objections. The final rule issued by HHS under the aegis of **U.S. President Joe Biden** unwinds provisions of a rule implemented under former **U.S. President Donald Trump** that would have denied federal funding to health care facilities that compelled clinicians to provide treatment such as abortion, contraceptives, or gender care at odds with their personal beliefs. The Trump-era rule from 2019 did not take effect after being blocked in federal court as a result of litigation challenging its legality. The new final rule takes effect March 11. Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

[Back](#)

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## 9. Register for Upcoming Webinars on Chronic Care Management, Patient Affordability Gap

**ChartSpan**, a newly endorsed **VHHA Shared Services** partner, is hosting a webinar on Thursday, Feb. 8 at 1 p.m. focused on chronic care management (CCM). Join to learn about the biggest CCM trends of 2023, why more practices are likely to embrace CCM in 2024, and the specific benefits of CCM. Register for the webinar [here](#). Also next month, newly endorsed **VHHA Shared Services** partner **AblePay** will host webinars focused on addressing the patient affordability gap. During the webinars, participants will learn how the AblePay solution can increase revenue while providing an overall better patient experience. Join to hear about provider case studies showing how the program positively changes patient payment behavior. The webinar will be offered twice. Register [here](#) to join on Thursday, Feb. 8 at 2 p.m., or register [here](#) to join on Friday, Feb. 9 at noon.

[Back](#)

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## 10. Around the State

The **University of Virginia School of Medicine** has named **Dr. Albert S. Jun**, MD, PhD, Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology, effective May 6, 2024. Dr. Jun comes to UVA from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he has served as chief of the Division of Cornea, Cataract, and External Diseases in the Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Institute. He earned his medical degree and his PhD in genetics and molecular biology from Emory University. He then completed an internship in internal medicine and a residency in ophthalmology at Johns Hopkins. Following his residency, he went on to complete a fellowship in cornea and external disease at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London, a fellowship in corneal gene therapy at the Imperial College School of Medicine in London and a clinician-scientist fellowship at Johns Hopkins. Read more [here](#).

**Rhodes B. Ritenour**, **Bon Secours Richmond** Market Vice President for External and Regulatory Affairs, has been named the 2024 Board Chair of the **American Diabetes Association**. Read more [here](#).

**Jim Willis** has been named Chief Operating Officer for **VCU Medical Center**. He has served as interim COO since March 2023. Read more [here](#).

**Ballad Health Associates** has named **Meridith OKeefe** as its new Chief Operating Officer. She brings more than 20 years of experience to this role and most recently served as Senior Vice President of Service Lines and Medical Group at Erlanger Health System. – Salinna Lor

[Back](#)

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