

The Unique Role of a Hospital

America's hospitals are vital to meeting the health care needs of the communities they serve by providing a wide range of acute care and diagnostic services, supporting public health needs, and offering a myriad of other services to promote the health and well-being of the community.

Other types of health care providers may also deliver some of these services; however, three things make the role of the hospital unique:

- **24/7 ACCESS TO CARE:** The provision of health care services, including specialized resources, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7), 365 days a year;
- **THE SAFETY-NET ROLE:** Caring for all patients who seek emergency care, regardless of ability to pay; and
- **DISASTER READINESS AND RESPONSE:** Ensuring that staff and facilities are prepared to care for victims of large-scale accidents, natural disasters, epidemics and terrorist actions.

These critical roles, collectively known as the “standby” role, represent an essential component of our nation's health and public safety infrastructure.¹ The standby role of hospitals is not explicitly funded; instead, the funding is built into a hospital's overall cost structure and supported by certain revenues received from providing direct patient care.

HOSPITAL