

# Federal Essential Health Systems Definition Key to Better Access, Equity

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-- Essential hospitals praised today's introduction of bipartisan legislation that would establish a federal definition of "essential health system" to give Congress a new tool to target support to these foundational members of the nation's health care safety net.



The legislation, the [Reinforcing Essential Health Systems for Communities Act](#), was introduced in the House by Reps. Lori Trahan (D-Mass.) and David Valadao (R-Calif.). It would consider [several](#)

[factors to define essential health systems](#), including the extent to which a hospital disproportionately serves low-income and uninsured patients and the amount of uncompensated care it provides.

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*Bruce Siegel, MD, MPH*

“We applaud these lawmakers for their leadership to support the safety net by giving policymakers a way to focus federal resources where they're needed most: on the hospitals that care for disadvantaged people and communities,” said Bruce Siegel, MD, MPH, president and CEO of [America's Essential Hospitals](#).

An essential health system definition would follow similar designations for other classes of providers, such as critical access hospitals and sole community hospitals. In each case, policymakers recognized the need to formally codify defining criteria and policy incentives to stabilize and protect these important providers within the larger health care ecosystem. But hospitals with a safety net mission lack a similar federal designation.

“We saw during the early days of the pandemic challenges identifying and targeting relief to hospitals serving communities hardest hit by the virus,” Siegel said. “This designation would give policymakers a tool for the next public health emergency to ensure support quickly goes where it can do the greatest good.”

Essential health system designation also would help bolster access to health care services for low-income and marginalized people—and by doing so, reduce disparities in care and drive more equitable care, Siegel said. “The nation’s essential hospitals are committed to partnering with policymakers to improve health care access and equity, and this designation can be a key piece of that important work,” he said.

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