

America's Essential Hospitals Recognizes Exemplary Member Programs

America's Essential Hospitals recognized six hospitals for outstanding work in improving health care quality, population health, and operational excellence.

WASHINGTON DC, DC, UNITED STATES, June 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- America's Essential Hospitals recognized six member hospitals for their outstanding work in improving health care quality, population health, and operational excellence.

The 2026 Gage Award winners were announced at VITAL2026, the association's annual meeting, in Minneapolis.

"Our essential hospitals continuously innovate to build health care for the future and meet the needs of their communities," said Jennifer DeCubellis, MA, president and CEO of America's Essential Hospitals. "The Gage Awards not only honor these mission commitments and problem-solving but also help us spread what works so all communities benefit."

Award for Quality Improvement: Denver Health, Denver

The OB Perinatal Addiction Recovery (OB PEAR) Program at Denver Health integrates substance use disorder screening, treatment, and care coordination into routine prenatal and postpartum care to reduce maternal morbidity.

"America's Essential Hospitals' recognition of Denver Health's HOPE team serves as powerful



validation that their work is making a difference. It also underscores the caliber and impact of the work, not only for a specific patient population but for an entire health system,” said Donna Lynne, DrPH, CEO, Denver Health. “HOPE is an example for many in how putting a system in place with the right purpose and focus can drive meaningful results.”

From May 2024 to August 2025, the program has identified 136 at-risk patients through harm reduction efforts and distributed 174 naloxone kits. Standardized workflows have connected 97% of patients screening positive for SUD to care.

Quality Improvement Honorable Mention: Hennepin Healthcare, Minneapolis

Hennepin Healthcare launched the Resident Integrated Support Environment (RISE) to lower high rates of suicide and untreated illness among physician trainees. RISE aims to normalize and facilitate access to care for trainees through integrated primary care, psychiatric and psychological services, and financial counseling.

“The RISE program was created from a simple but urgent belief: those who care for our community also deserve exceptional care themselves,” said John Cumming, MD, MBA, CEO, Hennepin Healthcare. “This Gage Award is deeply meaningful to Hennepin Healthcare because it recognizes that caring for the health care workforce is not secondary to our mission, it is foundational to it. It affirms an essential truth: when we invest in the well-being of our caregivers, we strengthen the care delivered to our patients, families, and community.”

Award for Population Health: SBH Health System, Bronx, N.Y.

The SBH Health and Wellness Center responds to systemic community challenges, including income inequality, housing instability, food insecurity, neighborhood safety concerns, and limited safe spaces for physical activity. It features 314 affordable housing units, including 94 units for high Medicaid users and individuals who have experienced homelessness; a medically based fitness center; a rooftop farm; and other amenities to help shift care upstream.

“Winning this award is a powerful acknowledgment of our commitment to delivering care that truly meets patients where they are,” said Manisha Kulshreshtha, MD, senior vice president, chief clinical and strategy officer, SBH Health System. “Our Health and Wellness Center was built to remove barriers and empower Bronx families to take charge of their health. I am grateful to our staff, patients, and partners whose dedication grounds every program in collaboration and lived experience. This recognition belongs to our entire community.”

Since implementation, all 314 affordable housing units are occupied. Gym membership grew from zero to 1,023 members, monthly food pantry distribution doubled, and patient satisfaction increased.

Population Health Honorable Mention: TMC Health, Tucson, Ariz.

Hearts Close to Home increases access to cardiac rehabilitation in rural communities. Telehealth infrastructure enables real-time clinical oversight by TMC cardiac rehabilitation specialists alongside in-person nursing support at local sites.

“This recognition highlights what is possible when innovation is paired with a commitment to access,” said Julia Strange, vice president of external affairs and brand, TMC Health. “Through our remote cardiac rehabilitation program, patients in rural communities can receive high-quality cardiac care without the burden of extensive travel. We are proud of the outcomes our patients have achieved and grateful to the care teams, partners and supporters who have helped make this program a success.”

Award for Operational Excellence: UK HealthCare, Lexington, Ky.

The Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment, and Health (EmPATH) program is a 24/7 psychiatric emergency observation unit designed to replace emergency department (ED) boarding for individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The treatment-first model includes embedded social work, on-site community mental health services and transportation, and a co-located long-acting injectable clinic.

“We are honored to receive this award,” said Lindsey Jasinski, PhD, chief administrative officer, Eastern State Hospital. “This recognition reflects the dedication of our EmPATH team and the importance of expanding innovative psychiatric emergency care. The most important thing we do every day: we provide hope. Many people come to us on their worst day, and we strive to start the healing process through connection. This award reinforces our commitment to continue improving access to compassionate, patient-centered mental health services for our communities.”

In the program’s first year, inpatient psychiatric admissions declined by 63.5%, 30-day readmissions to the state psychiatric hospital decreased by 13%, and ED boarding time dropped by 92.1%.

Operational Excellence Honorable Mention: NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue, New York

The Inpatient Lean Team is a hospitalwide operational improvement initiative designed to improve patient flow and optimize inpatient capacity. Core objectives include reclaiming unusable inpatient beds, accelerating discharges and room turnover, prioritizing interfacility transfers, and fostering real-time problem solving across clinical and operational teams.

“As a practicing emergency room physician, I know firsthand that emergency department overcrowding can negatively impact the quality, safety, and experience of patient care, as well as staff morale,” said Eric Wei, MD, MBA, CEO, NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue. “Through teamwork, data-driven problem solving, and a relentless focus on patient flow, our Inpatient

Lean Team has helped transform the care experience at Bellevue Hospital. I am grateful to our team for their extraordinary commitment to reducing wait times and enhancing patient care.”

For more about these and other successful essential hospital programs, [read Excellence and Innovation in Care: The 2026 Gage Awards](#), [watch video profiles on YouTube](#), and listen to the association's podcast, [The Safety Net Pulse](#).

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