Illinois Health and Hospital Association

IHA Releases Resource Highlighting Small and Rural Hospitals' Role as Major Employers and Economic Drivers

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) today will host its Small and Rural Hospitals Annual Meeting entitled, "Redefining the Rural Hospital of Tomorrow," at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

The event brings together rural healthcare leaders to identify ways to address healthcare challenges and exchange real-world examples and best practices to expand access to care and improve health outcomes for patients, while ensuring hospital viability. During today's event, IHA will release an updated resource highlighting the critical role of the state's 85 small and rural hospitals, which provide essential, lifesaving care to more than 1.6 million people who live in rural Illinois.

"The challenges facing healthcare are real, but so is the resilience of Illinois' small and rural hospitals. These hospitals not only provide high-quality care to patients, but they are also major employers and economic drivers in their communities," said IHA President and CEO A.J. Wilhelmi. "IHA is pleased to bring healthcare leaders together to share innovative strategies, explore new ideas and identify solutions to help us address today's financial and workforce challenges while also ensuring continued access to quality, compassionate care in our rural communities."

Shawn DuBravac, PhD, CFA, Global Futurist, Author, and President of the Avrio Institute will provide the meeting's keynote address entitled "The Future of Healthcare: Redefining the Rural Hospital of Tomorrow," which focuses on how to address care delivery in the next decade as financial and workforce pressures grow and patient needs evolve. DuBravac will also highlight how intelligent tools can expand access, stabilize operations, and strengthen the health of rural communities.

Dr. Tommy Ibrahim, MD, Executive Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer at Sanford Health, will speak to healthcare leaders on ways to navigate workforce shortages, financial pressures, an aging demographic with increasingly complex healthcare needs and rising consumer expectations—all while striving to expand access and sustain high-quality, affordable care in their communities. Dr. Ibrahim will also discuss leveraging AI-enabled workflows, expanding virtual care, strengthening value-based strategies, and building the systems and capabilities to support innovation at scale.

The event will also include an address from IHA President and CEO A.J. Wilhelmi and breakout sessions on advocacy, workforce programs, understanding the impact of federal policies, resources to support rural hospitals, and sharing innovative ideas on how to better serve patients and communities in rural areas.

On Wednesday, the Small and Rural Hospitals Annual Meeting kicked off with pre-workshops on how to use data analytics to improve operational performance and enhance quality care without overextending limited resources. A session also addressed how small and rural hospitals can preserve access to essential services, while navigating fluctuating reimbursement, rising labor costs, and evolving community needs.

The 85 small and rural hospitals in Illinois provide essential healthcare services to residents in rural areas and serve as leaders in their communities. As significant economic engines, small and rural hospitals have created approximately 86,909 jobs in Illinois and have a total economic impact of $21.4 billion annually across the state. For more information about the impact of small and rural hospitals in Illinois, *click here*.

About IHA

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association, with offices in Chicago, Naperville, and Springfield, advocates for Illinois' more than 200 hospitals and nearly 40 health systems as they serve their patients and communities. IHA members provide a broad range of services—not just within their walls, but across the continuum of healthcare and in their communities. Reflecting the diversity of the state, IHA members consist of nonprofit, investor-owned and public hospitals in the following categories: community, safety net, rural, critical access, specialty and teaching hospitals, including academic medical centers. For more information, see team-iha.org. Like IHA on Facebook. Follow IHA on Twitter.

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