

# COVID-19: Caring for Our Health Care Heroes During COVID-19

During this national health crisis, hospitals and health systems are doing everything they can to care for their patients and communities, and that extends to our health care heroes serving on the front lines – physicians, nurses and the entire health care team, including food services, environmental services, administrative, EMS and support staff. Even in normal circumstances, working in health care delivery is hard, stressful and tiring work; COVID-19 makes it especially exhausting physically and mentally. Here are some ways we can help care for and support our health care heroes.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique mental health stress points for health care workers, such as putting their families and colleagues at risk for exposure to the virus, making difficult decisions about how to conserve supplies and prioritize treatment, working extended shift hours and confronting an unimaginable death toll. Under these conditions, our health care heroes are likely to experience increased anxiety, depression, trauma, burnout and other mental health issues. Please refer to page 4 for AHA resources dedicated to clinician burnout and suicide prevention.

**Some ways hospitals are supporting their workers' mental health needs include:**

### **1 | Use spiritual and emotional care services to address compassion fatigue and burnout among staff.**

- [Atrium Health](#), Charlotte, N.C., set up prayer lines, provided tips on ways to mentally recharge in a short time and distributed goodie bags that typically include an inspirational quote and a candy. They also operate a program called Code Lavender that offers rapid-response emotional support to health care workers from trained practitioners. Many hospitals have similar [Code Lavender](#) programs, including Cleveland Clinic and Northwell Health.

### **2 | Create internal mental health training for all staff that goes beyond using employee assistance programs and health benefits.**

- [UCHealth](#), Aurora, Colo., implemented additional mental health training programs to help their health care workers cope with the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- UCSF Medical Center developed a nine-week [webinar series](#), “Emotional Well-Being During the COVID-19 Crisis for Health Care Providers.”

### **3 | Provide access to mental health check-ins for staff and areas to decompress.**

- [Ochsner Health](#) in southeast Louisiana set up relaxation areas with calming music, low lighting and other amenities. It filled sidewalks with chalk messages of encouragement at employee entrances.
- [Cody \(Wyoming\) Regional Health](#) created a wellness area to provide a calming place to recover the mind, body and soul. The new space, staffed 24/7, includes a meditation room, eight bedrooms with private bathrooms, laundry and shower facilities, on-site access to licensed therapists for emotional support, puzzles and games, and an exercise area to meet employee needs.

## FOOD ACCESS

Staff may be missing meals and/or snacking on calorie-dense foods due to coverage issues and other operational needs. Skipping meals and not properly fueling the body is not physically or mentally healthy. Limited hours for grocery stores and restaurant closures also contribute to the situation.

### **Here are some steps hospitals are taking to improve access to healthy food options during COVID-19:**

- 1 | Identify and work with local businesses that would like to donate meals to staff.** Websites like [Give InKind](#) coordinate delivering meals to hospital staff. A hospital creates a wish list for delivery from a local restaurant and community members sign up to have the meals delivered.
  - [Fisher-Titus Medical Center](#), Norwalk, Ohio, received numerous offers of meals for health care staff from local businesses. Screeners meet the donors at the door and deliver the food to the staff. The hospital foundation tracks the donations and writes a thank-you letter to each of the businesses.
  - At [St. Joseph Hospital](#), Bangor, Maine, donors can bring gifts of food to the emergency department, where hospital staff receive the food and thank the contributors. In-kind gifts also are accepted outside the building and screened by the supply chain team.
- 2 | Collaborate with hospital-run or local mobile farmers market programs to provide nutritious food to staff.** Many of these programs take Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and offer subsidies that would increase food access to low-wage workers.
  - Virtua Willingboro (N.J.) Hospital is providing fresh produce to staff free of charge.
  - [Ochsner Health](#) set up a pop-up grocery store in its cafeteria where staff can purchase essentials like bread, milk, eggs and orange juice.
- 3 | Provide snack bins in all breakrooms that offer nutrient-dense foods (e.g., fruit, bars, nuts).**
- 4 | Connect with the hospital's foundation to develop programs that support the workforce's food needs.**
  - [Lake Region Healthcare](#), Fergus Falls, Minn., refers all offers of gifts, whether monetary or in-kind, to the system's foundation. The foundation created a COVID-19 Relief and Response Fund and lists on its webpage needed categories for gifts-in-kind.



## **HOUSING**

With long hours and close proximity to COVID-19 patients, health care workers have expressed their anxiety about housing. They may expose their families to the virus when they return home or have long commutes on each end of their shifts. To keep health care workers and their families safe, it is important for hospitals to address housing needs as they arrive.

Through Rooms for Responders, Marriott Bonvoy, in collaboration with American Express and JPMorgan Chase, is providing no-cost rooms to health care workers in hot spot cities. In addition, Hilton and American Express are donating up to 1 million hotel rooms to individual front-line medical professionals during the COVID-19 crisis. Learn more details at AHA's site, [www.100millionmasks.org/discounts](http://www.100millionmasks.org/discounts).

### **Actions hospitals are taking to address housing needs include:**

- 1 | Explore temporary housing options for staff who are not comfortable returning home for fear of exposing their families to COVID-19.** Hospitals are partnering with local hotels, universities, rental properties or Airbnb to develop contingency plans in the event that there is a need for temporary housing for health care workers.
  - [NCH Healthcare System](#), Naples, Fla., is securing accommodations for front-line health care workers who treat COVID-19 patients if it becomes an immediate need.
  - AHA's affiliate, the American Society for Health Care Engineering partnered with the Center for Healthcare Design to build a hospital-hotel matching service. The [MakingRoom](#) website provides hospitals with a forum to communicate their space needs and for hotels and other high-occupancy facilities to indicate their capacity and availability.
  - [HCA Healthcare](#) is offering employees free scrub laundering and is working with major hotel chains to provide housing for providers who work directly with COVID-19 patients.
- 2 | Offer [shower facilities](#) for use by all staff so that they have the option to clean and sanitize themselves prior to returning home.** This option allows staff to feel safer when they go home to their families.
  - [UCSF Health](#) partnered with the YMCA to offer shower facilities.



## **CONCLUSION**

**By supporting and addressing the social needs of the health care workforce, hospitals continue to show their commitment and dedication to keeping Americans safe and healthy. Protecting the social needs of health care workers is one of the many ways that hospitals can continue to provide high-quality care to patients.**

## **RESOURCES**

Visit [aha.org/covid-19](https://aha.org/covid-19) to view nonclinical COVID-19 resources, including the subpage [Protecting and Enabling Health Care Workers](#).

Visit this AHA [webpage](#) for a list of companies offering discounts and offers to front-line health care workers to show their support during COVID-19.

The AHA's [Physician Alliance](#) has numerous resources to support the health care workforce.

- The [Physician Well-being Playbook](#). A guide to combating clinician burnout for hospital and health system leaders.
- [Be Well: Preventing Physician Suicide Podcast Series](#) featuring Michael Weinstein, M.D., Heather Farley, M.D., and Michael Myers, M.D., MBE, MPH.
- [Social Determinants of Health Virtual Expedition Modules](#). This tool helps clinicians understand and tackle the social determinants of health.

The National Center for PTSD offers [Managing Healthcare Workers' Stress Associated with the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak](#). The Center also co-hosted the [webinar](#) "Caring for Yourself & Others During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Managing Healthcare Workers' Stress" with the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Care.

[Understanding and Addressing Sources of Anxiety Among Health Care Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). This JAMA Viewpoint summarizes key considerations for supporting the health care workforce so health care professionals are equipped to provide care for their patients and communities.

[Resources to Support the Health and Well-Being of Clinicians During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#). These resources from the National Academy of Medicine offer information on how to support the health and well-being of clinicians during public health emergencies.

[Resources to Support Mental Health and Coping with the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has compiled a selection of webpages and information sheets on mental health and coping with the effects of COVID-19.

[Caring for the Caregiver: Implementing RISE \(Resilience in Stressful Events\)](#). The RISE team at Johns Hopkins Medicine and staff at the Maryland Patient Safety Center are offering a complimentary copy of their Peer Responder Basic Training Manual to requesting individuals and hospitals.

[Apps for Wellness and Mental Health](#). The University of California San Francisco curated a list apps to help individuals practice self-care.

Visit AHA's [Stories from the Front Lines](#) to read more ways people are overcoming extraordinary challenges and saving lives. If you have stories about how you are supporting the social needs of your workforce, we encourage you to [share your story](#).