

AMERICAN HOSPITALS

HEALING A BROKEN SYSTEM



An B Above Theatrical Release Associate Producer Wendell Potter
Animation MaGik World Director of Photography Paul Van Haute
Editor/Sound Design Henry Nevison Writers Vincent Mondillo and Richard Master
Executive Producer Richard Master Producer/Director Vincent Mondillo

FIXITHEALTHCARE.COM

GUIDE TO PLANNING AN IMPACTFUL SCREENING

Why hold hospitals accountable?

Health care has a stranglehold on the U.S. economy, dominating our annual national spending with unsustainable, out-of-control growth that far outpaces annual economic growth. Of the \$4.5 trillion Americans will spend on healthcare this year, hospitals will grab by far the biggest share – nearly one of every three of those dollars.

That's triple the amount Americans spend on prescription drugs. Yet hospitals have avoided the scrutiny of lawmakers and the media, while extracting massive amounts of revenue from their communities with little accountability regarding cost and expansion.

As journalist and New York Times best-selling author Elisabeth Rosenthal says in the movie, "Hospitals get off scot-free."

American Hospitals examines the economic structure of an industry that is charging outrageous fees while sitting on billions of dollars in accumulated cash – while 100 million Americans suffer from medical debt. Hospitals are the driving force that makes the average cost of a family health insurance policy exceed \$22,000, plus an additional deductible cost of up to \$18,200.

The underlying economic system of hospitals means inequity is baked into treatment. It has enabled big hospital systems to reach monopoly power in almost all American cities while rural and inner city safety net hospitals are being shut down because they serve lower income patients on Medicare and Medicaid.

But there are solutions that can succeed in holding hospitals accountable while reducing cost and improving quality. Countries around the world pay half the amount for health care and have better outcomes. Policy changes can bring more equitable distribution of care to the American hospital system.



"In our very messed up hospital system - everyone wants a bad guy. They talk about insurers. They talk about Pharma. But hospitals get off relatively scot-free."

Dr. Elisabeth Rosenthal
Kaiser Health News
Editor-in-Chief

Tips for an Impactful Screening Event

Setup and Promotion (4-6 weeks out)

- **Event Marketing**

- Utilize the [American Hospitals marketing materials](#) to put together a flier, send a newsletter to your list, and post your event to social media as early as you can.
- Plan for regular follow-up posts and at least 1-2 more newsletter emails prior to your event
- Send a request for promotion to any partner organizations that might want to help support your screening, including your flier and additional marketing materials for them to utilize

- **Press and PR**

- Send a press release to local media (TV, radio, print) highlighting your event and any VIPs participating.
- Consider timing op-eds or letters to the editor from your members with your screening.

- **Ideas for Post-Film Programming**

- Panel Discussion: Bring voices who can contextualize American Hospitals in your local challenges and goals together for a conversation after the film. Consider including a diversity of backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives to ensure a substantive discussion.
- Town Hall with Experts and/or Lawmakers: Screening events can provide an opportunity for a town hall style Q&A with local experts or lawmakers about their plans for changing the system.

- **Prep Your People**

- Identify a moderator or MC for your event
- VIPs: Reach out to any local officials or VIPs who you would like to include in your event. Request that they provide an introduction to the event, serve as a moderator for conversation, or sit on a panel.
- Set a prep call with all panelists and speakers for the event 1-2 weeks ahead of your screening

- **Prepare an Agenda for the Event:** Include introductions, timing, and any guidelines for post-film conversation as needed.

Day-of

- Send a final reminder email about the event to your constituents
- Post reminders and graphics to social media
- Arrive early to coordinate with the venue on AV, mics, and any other setup needs
- Bring handouts, literature, and printed “about the film” survey for the audience

Make It Memorable

- **Set Up a “Tell Your Story” Station:** You’d be hard-pressed to find an American who doesn’t have a story to tell about a massive hospital bill, a surprise charge, or a tragic closure of a local hospital. Set up a simple station with a volunteer or staffer who can record video testimonials from your audience about how they’ve been hurt by our hospital system, and why it’s important we hold hospitals accountable.
- **Simulate the Red Carpet with a “Step and Repeat”:** Gather great photos from your screening with a red carpet “step and repeat” - a spot where your audience can pose for a photo with a sign featuring your call to action or with the film poster
- **Eye-catching Takeaways:** Utilize the film’s graphics and photo assets to create compelling postcards or other literature takeaways with clear and concise next steps for your audience.

Suzanne’s breast cancer diagnosis resulted in her blowing through her life savings and selling her dream home to cover her hospital bills.

“When you get diagnosed with cancer, the last thing your family wants to think about is: how can we afford this?”

Suzanne Thomas
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Turn Your Screening into Action

Hold Your Hospital Accountable

There are many concrete ways you can help make sure your local hospitals are reinvesting in your community and, for nonprofit hospitals, making good on their required community benefit. Here are some concrete steps you can take.

Step 1. Do Your Research

First, find out how your hospital stacks up when it comes to health equity, community benefit spending, and overall social responsibility. Here are some resources to get you started:

[Lown Institute Hospitals Index](#)

The Lown Institute rates hospitals nationwide on 53 different metrics — everything from the value of the health care they provide to patient outcomes to their community benefit and staff pay equity. If you want to look at all data in your state or city, you can sort geographically, too.

[Hospital Fair Share Spending](#)

To maintain their nonprofit status, hospitals are required by the IRS to “demonstrate community benefit.” This Fair Share Spending tool compares nonprofit hospitals’ tax exemptions with the amount they’re reinvesting in their communities — essentially, the amount taxpayers are losing out in the equation. As of 2019, nonprofit hospitals nationwide had a deficit of \$18.4 billion dollars. [Use this tool](#) to see if nonprofit hospitals in your state and city are keeping up with their end of the bargain.

Review Your Hospital’s Community Health Needs Assessment

All nonprofit hospitals are now required by law to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment and implementation plan every three years. This report must be widely available to the public and is often posted to the hospital’s website. While these reports are intended to guide the hospital’s charitable care and community benefit, there is no requirement that they do — which is something you or your lawmakers can help change. Write a letter or stage a press conference to demand that your hospital meets the true needs of the community.

Step 2. Take Action

Advocate for Better Regulation

It's hard to believe, but as of spring 2023, there is no federal requirement that hospitals spend a minimum amount on their community benefit; that they describe the activities they are including as community benefit spending; or that their community benefit spending must actually be linked to their Community Health Needs Assessment.



To fill this void, states and cities are starting to take meaningful steps to better regulate hospitals' community benefit programs. Here are some policy ideas to explore as potential solutions in your community:

- **Ask Your State to Conduct an Audit.** Your state's attorney general, state legislators, your local comptroller, and others can request that agencies monitor how specific industries and programs are performing, and can provide insight and data to make policy recommendations. Take a look at the impact of [Montana's hospital community benefit audit here](#), and consider reaching out to your state and local officials to request a similar audit of your local hospital.
- **Demand a Minimum Requirement for Community Benefit Spending.** States can require that hospitals spend a percent of their income on specific kinds of care or community benefit, or tie that spending to match the hospital's tax exemption. [Visit the National Academy for State Health Policy](#) to see how different states are approaching this kind of requirement.
- **Demand Accountability and Transparency on Hospital Community Benefits.** Consider approaching your legislators, or going to your local hospital directly, to demand a detailed, transparent accounting of how they calculate their community benefit spending. The National Academy for State Health Policy has created several [templates you can take to your legislators](#), who can use them to better capture hospitals' community benefit spending and how it relates to their Community Health Needs Assessment — an assessment which is already required by the Affordable Care Act. NASHP has also outlined the specifics of how states like Oregon and Massachusetts are collecting and regulating community benefit information [here](#).
- **Demand that Hospitals Reinvest Where Care is Needed Most.** States have licensing power for hospitals, and can incentivize hospitals to invest in public health initiatives — like mental health care or affordable housing — or in rural or underserved communities, as a condition for operations or as part of their community benefit. Take a look at some of the ideas and programs being tested out in this [Center for American Progress report](#).

Demand a Place on your Hospital's Board

Hospital boards are typically governed by state laws and regulations, but the bylaws, composition, and governance of these boards are developed and updated by the board itself and other stakeholders. Community members can put pressure on the hospital's board of directors through a variety of means to ensure that the diversity of the community and its concerns are reflected on the board. The hospital's board should not just be comprised of fundraisers, but of people with skills, experience, and perspectives that can better integrate the hospital's mission with the people it serves. Here are some ideas for influencing your local hospital's board makeup:

- **Apply to be a board member:** Some nonprofit healthcare providers consider applications or nominations from the public for new board positions. Throw your name in the ring for an opportunity to influence the hospital's decisionmaking; to start, reach out by phone or email for information on how to apply or pursue a position on the board.
- **Demand a more inclusive board:** Recruitment and selection of hospital board members often follow specific criteria for skills or assets that potential members will bring to the hospital. Write to your hospital with two key demands: That criteria for new board members include lived experience, knowledge of the community, and diversity; and that the board bylaws stipulate that the board's composition reflects the composition of the community.

Raise Awareness in the Media

Americans are fed up with our overpriced, inequitable, profit-driven health care system. And finally, the media has started to take notice. Take this story to your local news outlets to raise awareness in your community about how your hospitals are operating and how they can be a part of the solution.

Letter to the Editor and Op-Ed Tips

There has been a promising uptick in coverage in the media of out-of-control hospital pricing and closures of safety net and rural hospitals. Help keep that momentum up, and make sure your local press and readers understand the nuances of these issues - and potential solutions, drawing on our [policy primer here](#).

Our partner organization, Physicians for a National Health Program, has some great tips on writing a letter to the editor in your local paper - copied with their permission below. You can also see [example letters on PNHP's website here](#).

Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper is one of the best ways to influence health care reform. Letters to the editor are an easy way to voice your opinion, draw attention to an issue, bring issues to the attention of your legislators, and correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article.

Submitting an effective letter

- Keep it short
- Use local statistics and personal stories
- Relate your letter to a recent article or op-ed
- Include your phone numbers and address, as the publication will need to confirm that you wrote the letter before they publish it.

Influencing Editorials

Editorials endorsing a particular issue or piece of legislation can change even the most committed policy maker's mind.

- Research the newspaper to discover if they already have written an editorial on the topic and to make sure that their editorials are locally written.
- Research your topic with an eye to arguments from other sides.

Writing Op-Eds

- Opinion/editorials are longer than letters to the editor (between 500 and 800 words.)
- Be newsworthy: Tie your topic into an upcoming vote, appropriate holiday, anniversary, community event, the release of a new report, a recent article, or a popular movie.
- Consider inviting a respected or influential member or your community to co-sign or co-author the Op-Ed with you.
- Use local statistics to capture people's attention.
- It usually takes editorial boards two weeks to review submissions.

"The business model is not based on providing care. It is based on making money."

Susan Rogers, MD

Physicians for a National Health Program
President



Stage a Press Conference or Rally

Does it feel like your local news-media is asleep at the wheel when it comes to issues with your hospitals and health care? Make sure folks perk up and pay attention by staging a press conference or rally outside your hospital to draw attention to a specific problem. Here are some basic steps to garnering attention and driving turnout:



Issue a press release:

- Focus on 3-5 top messaging points to promote for the press to focus on
- Consider pivoting to your proposed solution – [you can draw on our FAQs here](#).
- Include basic information for the event - time, location, your organization, name and contact information for the press

Timing: Middle of the week, mornings, slower news days

Recruit volunteers and supporters via email, social media, fliers and word of mouth.

Speakers and VIPs:

- Include both local VIPs (supportive policymakers, experts, activists) as well as people with lived experience or who have been directly impacted by problems with the hospital
- Prep your speakers with messaging and give them each 3-5 minutes to share their story or make their case

Location and Setup Basics:

- Pick a striking, evocative background - get the hospital in the shot
- AV / sound

Promotion: Gather clips and photos for social media - and don't forget to tell the story of your event after the fact to help document your impact.

**Thank you for being a part of this
movement.**

Stay connected with the film:

info@fixithehealthcare.com

[Facebook.com/fixitfilms](https://www.facebook.com/fixitfilms)

[Twitter.com/fixitfilms](https://twitter.com/fixitfilms)

