

Hospitals are taking action to protect healthcare workers from rising violence. More help is needed now.

Hospitals in New York and across the nation are reporting a major increase in the number of healthcare workers being threatened or seriously injured by patients or visitors.

Most patients and visitors are respectful. However, intimidating or violent behavior toward staff has major consequences. These incidents cause physical injuries, such as fractures and permanent disabilities, psychological distress, absenteeism, decreased morale and increased staff turnover. At a time when hospitals are already experiencing severe workforce shortages, rising acts of violence by patients and visitors are causing significant disruption to hospitals' workforces and their patients' access to care.

Hospitals have taken many actions to maintain a safe and healing space for staff and patients, but more must be done. State and federal support is needed now.

Hospitals are creating safer workplaces

In addition to following rigorous violence prevention regulations and accreditation standards, hospitals and health systems across New York have launched robust initiatives to create safer and more respectful environments for patients, staff and visitors. These include:

- requiring advanced staff training on prevention and de-escalation;
- establishing early warning systems and interventions to identify the risk of and prevent violence before it occurs;
- building workgroups and teams specifically dedicated to workplace violence, including full-time leads;
- collecting, analyzing and sharing data to guide initiatives; and
- educating visitors, patients and team members on proper behavior in the healthcare setting.

HANYS has convened workgroups and experts to share strategies with hospitals on preventing and managing patients exhibiting aggressive behavior; the American Hospital Association's Hospitals Against Violence initiative is raising awareness of workplace violence and hospitals' work to address it.

Hospitals are working hard to protect their employees, but they can't do it alone. Policymakers must help ensure the safety of New York's healthcare workers.

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State and federal leaders must act now to help protect care providers working in hospitals

Urgent action must be taken at the state and federal levels to deter violence in our healthcare settings. Policymakers have several opportunities to help hospitals protect their workers right now:

Federal proposals

- HANYS urges Congress to pass the Safety from Violence for Healthcare Employees Act of 2023 (H.R. 2584/S. 2768). This bipartisan legislation would make it a federal crime to assault or intimidate a hospital employee. The SAVE Act would also establish a federal grant program to support hospitals' efforts to reduce violence, among other provisions to protect hospital personnel from violence.

State proposals

- HANYS urges Gov. Hochul and the Legislature to **close the Medicaid funding gap** for hospitals and health systems so they have the resources to support and expand existing safety initiatives, such as innovative workplace safety programs, staff trainings and hiring additional security personnel.
- HANYS also urges lawmakers to **include a dedicated capital program** in the state fiscal year 2024-2025 budget to enable hospitals and health systems to create safer facilities for their employees and patients. This program would fund security-related physical plan improvements, such as creating single points of entry, installing metal detectors and increasing the availability of panic buttons.
- Current New York state law makes it a second-degree felony to assault an on-duty registered nurse, licensed practical nurse or healthcare worker providing direct patient care. However, the law fails to protect the many non-medical employees and volunteers who care for and interact with patients and visitors every day. HANYS urges the Legislature to **advance legislation amending Penal Law Code Section 120.05** to provide all employees and volunteers working in healthcare settings with the same protections.

An environment that promotes the dignity and safety of staff, visitors and patients is essential to providing high-quality care. Together, we can make our hospitals safer and more welcoming for all who enter their doors.