Americans rely heavily on hospitals to provide 24/7 access to care for all types of patients, to serve as a safety net provider for vulnerable populations and to have the resources and skills needed to respond to disasters.

These roles are not explicitly funded; instead they are built into a hospital's overall cost structure and supported by revenues received from providing direct patient care.

Other care sites don't share these roles or bear these costs, yet some policymakers want to make total payment for a service provided in a hospital the same as when a service is provided in a physician office.

Hospitals provided $39.4 billion in uncompensated care in 2010.

| Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey 2009; National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey 2009. 

Hospitals must be prepared to respond to a range of natural and man-made disasters.

- 2012:
  - Aurora, CO: Shooting at local theater kills 12 and injures 58.
  - Doswell, VA: Motor coach rolls over on highway kills four and injures 49.
  - Indianapolis, IN: Chemical spill prompts aquatic center evacuation. 79 people, mostly children, injured and taken to local hospitals.

- 2011:
  - Joplin, MO: Tornado hits Joplin, Missouri, kills 158 and injures 990.
  - Reno, NV: Plane collides with grandstand at air race, kills 11 and injures 65.
  - Six hurricanes/tropical storms have made landfall in the last two years, in addition to ongoing tornado and seismic activity.

Hospitals provided training for tomorrow's health care professionals.

- In 2011, hospitals provided a training site for more than 107,000 residents.