



How to use the 2026 Environmental Scan

The 2026 Environmental Scan is more than a snapshot of today's health care landscape — it's a tool to help hospitals, health systems and other stakeholders anticipate change and prepare for tomorrow. Here are ways to use it with your staff, leaders, boards and communities.

Scan the QR code to download the Environmental Scan or visit aha.org/environmentalscan.



Leadership Strategy Guide

- **Spark discussion:** Share the Scan at board meetings, retreats or staff forums. Ask: *What two or three insights most surprise or concern you? What are the implications for our patients, community and organization? If we were reinventing health care from scratch, how would we design it to meet these challenges?*
- **Tell your story:** Use the Scan to frame your organization's narrative for the community, legislators and funders. Translate insights into presentations, reports or op-eds that highlight the challenges and opportunities as well as your role in advancing health.
- **Strengthen the workforce of the future:** Identify strategies that support well-being and prepare teams for evolving care models. Consider new skills, flexible work models and leadership development. Address both clinical and nonclinical workforce capacity. *How can technology be integrated as a true partner to the workforce — streamlining administrative tasks, reducing burnout and enabling clinicians to focus on high-value, patient-facing work?*
- **Integrate AI and digital transformation:** Explore how automation, virtual care and data-driven tools can reshape care delivery and outcomes, workforce support and patient engagement. Use the Scan to guide conversations about building a responsible AI and technology strategy. Discuss new tech-focused competencies that your leaders and teams need.
- **Leverage data as a strategic asset:** Hospitals generate massive amounts of data each year. Use the Scan to discuss how to turn that data into actionable insights to enhance decision-making, predictive analytics, operational efficiency and patient outcomes — while maintaining trust and privacy.
- **Scenario planning and agility:** Treat the Scan as a living tool for stress-testing strategies. Ask questions like: *How would our organization adapt if reimbursement models shift, consumer expectations change or new competitors emerge?*
- **Engage patients and communities as co-designers:** Use the Scan to frame conversations with patient advisory councils or community forums. Co-create solutions that reflect the needs and values of those you serve. Assess social drivers of health in your community. Explore or expand community partnerships.
- **Continue scanning:** The AHA provides regular market intelligence updates through the weekly **Market Scan e-newsletter** and a daily roundup of news and resources through **AHA Today**. Additionally, explore key issues through the Society for Health Care Strategy & Market Development's **Futurescan**.

By using the Environmental Scan not only to reflect on today but to anticipate tomorrow, your organization can build resilience, embrace innovation and stay aligned with the evolving needs of patients and communities.

AMERICA'S HEALTH CHECKUP: EMPOWERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Hospitals and health systems are more than centers of clinical care — they are foundational pillars for an infrastructure of community health and well-being. The AHA's Environmental Scan shows the nation faces higher rates of chronic conditions — heart disease, diabetes, obesity and mental health disorders — than comparable countries. These challenges affect individuals and families while placing significant strain on the health care system and economy.

Hospitals are uniquely positioned to lead education and prevention efforts as well as contribute to a community's efforts to address social drivers of health. Today, 95% of hospitals collect data on patients' health-related social needs to inform discharge planning, referrals and community needs assessments. Almost half of hospitals integrate behavioral health services into primary care, and most provide preventive services such as health education and screenings.

Empowering healthier communities requires more than clinical care — it demands collaboration, education and advocacy. Through initiatives like the [**Hospital Community Collaborative**](#), hospitals work with local organizations to tackle food insecurity and other social needs. The AHA's [**Care Delivery Transformation Framework**](#) offers tools to build partnerships and social needs screening programs, while the [**Community Health Assessment Toolkit**](#) helps hospitals identify priorities and design targeted interventions.

Nutrition is an important component of addressing health improvement. Nearly eight in 10 hospitals (77%) offer dedicated nutrition programs. The AHA shares best practices, such as the Advancing Health podcast episode, "[**Food as Medicine: How Cleveland Clinic Is Nourishing Community Health**](#)." These initiatives show how addressing food insecurity improves outcomes and strengthens trust.



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Maternal health also deserves focused attention. The AHA's [**Better Health for Mothers and Babies**](#) initiative provides a comprehensive toolkit and [**case examples**](#) to help hospitals address social needs and improve outcomes for expectant mothers and infants.

We'll be discussing these issues and more at the [**2026 Healthier Together Conference**](#), May 12-14 in Dallas, where leaders from hospitals, health systems, public health and community organizations will share strategies to reduce disparities and improve health for all. We hope you'll join us to lead the way in transforming care and building healthier communities.

As we move forward, let's harness data, innovation and community partnerships to create a future where every American has the opportunity to live a healthy life.