

**U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means Hearing**  
**Health Subcommittee**  
**“After the Hospital: Ensuring Access to Quality Post-Acute Care”**

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Chairman Buchanan, Ranking Member Doggett, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Chairman Buchanan, I deeply appreciate your leadership and dedication to improving healthcare for Floridians.

As President and CEO of Empath Health, one of the nation’s largest not-for-profit home-based care organizations, it is an honor and privilege to serve one in five Floridians who need hospice care. Empath is also a proud member of the National Alliance for Care at Home, advocating for policies that protect and expand access to care where patients need it the most—at home.

My commitment to this mission is deeply personal. After losing my first daughter at birth, I dedicated my life’s work to ensuring that no family faces serious illness or loss without the support, dignity, and compassion they deserve. That experience shaped my belief that health care must do more than treat symptoms—it must care for the whole person and those who love them.

That passion led me to spend three decades advocating for patient-centered care and the future of health care delivery. In 2011, I co-authored *The New Health Age: The Future of Healthcare in America* with futurist David Houle, examining how our health care system must evolve to provide more compassionate, cost-effective, and proactive home-based solutions. Today, as the leader of Empath Health, I remain committed to advancing that vision—ensuring that patients and families have access to the right care, at the right time, in the place they call home.

That is the foundation to my testimony: to speak for the millions of Americans who rely on home-based care and the policies that make it possible.

**The Power of Home-Based Care**

At Empath, we witness and deliver the profound impact of care at home every day.

- For one mother with advanced cancer, choosing hospice was not about giving up—it was about choosing to live fully, on her terms. She bravely forwent aggressive treatments that would have kept her in and out of the hospital, away from her young children, and instead embraced care focused on comfort, dignity, and time with family. Hospice kept her symptoms managed at home, avoiding countless emergency room visits. Her husband had the support that he needed to make confident decisions, knowing expert help was just a call away. Instead of spending her final months on FaceTime from a hospital bed, she was home—reading to her children every

night, surrounded by love. Her choice gave this patient quality of life and spared her family the financial burden of medical interventions that could never change the outcome.

- But home-based care is not just for those at the end of life. It supports people managing chronic illness, recovering from surgery, or navigating a terminal diagnosis. Keeping patients at home prevents costly hospitalizations and reduces strain on the health care system.
- PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) is another example of a proactive based, innovative solution that works; and Empath is proud to provide this program in Florida. A frail elder enrolled in our PACE program was struggling to live safely at home. Without intervention, a nursing home admission was imminent. Through wraparound case management, coordinated geriatric medical care, and adult day center services, he regained stability, avoided institutional care, and continued to live independently—a full life. PACE programs across the country have proven their ability to reduce hospitalizations and improve quality of life while lowering costs.
- Home health allows patients to recover safely in their own homes after surgery or a major illness. Whether it is a father regaining mobility after heart surgery or a patient managing a complex chronic condition, skilled home health care prevents unnecessary hospital readmissions, saving both lives and taxpayer dollars.
- Hospice is a vital component of Empath’s care continuum of services, providing expert pain management, emotional support, and dignity for those facing terminal illness. But hospice is also about caring for those left behind. Empath’s bereavement programs ensure that grieving children, spouses, and families have the support that they need to heal.

We call this Full Life Care—a wholistic, patient-centered approach that provides the right care, at the right time, in the place patients call home. But today, access to this type of care is at risk.

### **The Threats to Home-Based Care**

Despite its proven value, home-based care faces mounting challenges:

- The IMPACT Act of 2014 and Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 have destabilized home health. Instead of budget neutrality, \$Billions in cuts have disrupted the most cost-effective post-acute care option, which achieves better outcomes. Meanwhile, there are also certain Medicare Advantage Plans that offer inadequate reimbursement and mandate excessive administrative burdens, forcing some home health agencies to close, leaving too many home health referrals unanswered.
- Many hospice providers are also under immense pressure—thin margins and excessive audits, while other hospices work to actively dodge fraud detection and enforcement, and profit from this tactic. While legitimate providers face intense scrutiny, bad actors continue to exploit the system. Some hospices avoid reporting quality scores to CMS altogether—a loophole that should

not be tolerated. The flawed Hospice Special Focus Program, based on incomplete data, risks destabilizing trusted hospice providers instead of focusing on those who truly abuse the system.

- Health care workforce shortages continue to limit access. Demand for skilled nurses, physicians, aides, and hospice caregivers far exceeds supply, straining the entire care continuum. Without targeted investments in workforce development, recruitment, and retention, access will continue to erode.
- Expiring telehealth flexibilities threaten rural and underserved hospice patients, especially. Remote certification visits have expanded access to timely care, especially for hospice patients, yet these policies are set to lapse. Congress must act to ensure these flexibility remains in place.

These are not just policy discussions—they are urgent threats to access, quality, and patient choice. Without action, more patients will lose the option to receive care at home, leading to costly hospitalizations and long-term care stays that burden families and the health care system.

### **A Path Forward**

As the CEO of a non-acute care health system, serving approximately 80,000 lives annually across the state of Florida, I understand that financial strength and balanced budgets are essential for companies, states, and nations to thrive. As Congress navigates today's budget challenges, I urge you to consider:

1. Invest in home-based care—data proves that care at home improves outcomes and reduces Medicare spending.
2. Implement pay-for-performance—reward high-quality providers and hold those who evade accountability responsible.
3. Expand proven value-based care models—while the CMS Hospice Carve-In Pilot fell short (i.e., VBID), programs like PACE, special needs MA plans, and ACOs to name a few, have successfully preserved the integrity of hospice and home health while lowering costs.

I serve as an advocate for the tens of thousands of Medicare beneficiaries that Empath Health serves and the millions more who rely on mission-driven home-based care providers nationwide.

The decisions made by this Congress will shape the future of care at home. Let us act now to protect and expand access to home-based care before more patients lose or never receive this vital option.

Thank you.