



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR KATHLEEN PASSIDOMO
President

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators
FROM: Kathleen Passidomo
SUBJECT: Live Healthy
DATE: November 9, 2023

As we look ahead to 2024, the broad appeal of the free state of Florida continues to attract families, businesses, and seniors. In fact, our estimates suggest that over the next five years, our population will grow by almost 300,000 new residents per year, over 800 per day. That is like adding a city slightly smaller than Orlando, but larger than St. Petersburg every year.

While this growth will impact so many areas of public policy, my focus for the upcoming session will be on our health care system. Specifically, growing Florida's health care workforce, increasing access, and incentivizing innovation, so Floridians can have more options and opportunities to live healthy.

The fact is, we will need more maternity rooms to welcome new Floridians to the family. We will need more services for our elders to live out their golden years safely and with dignity. We will need more primary care providers who play a vital role as the main point of contact in the health care system for families and seniors.

Access to health care is important at every phase of life. Insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) does not guarantee access. Even Floridians with great insurance face barriers to care.

The number of physicians in Florida in 2019 was 3,835 fewer than we need to meet demand, according to a 2021 IHS Markit study. Estimates project a potential shortfall of nearly 18,000 physicians by 2035. That means our available physician workforce would meet only 77% of Florida's health care needs. Additionally, Florida's physician licensure data suggests that in 2022 there were 58,062 full-time physicians actively practicing in our state. Their average age is 53 and about 33% percent are over age 60.

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A companion study reported the number of registered nurses (RNs) in Florida fell short of demand by 11,500, and the number of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) by 5,600 in 2019. Based on this study's projections, Florida would have a shortfall of 37,400 RNs and 21,700 LPNs by 2035.

It is clear to me that we have work to do to make sure Florida's health care workforce is growing – just like the rest of our state. Our rural areas need more health care providers, so sick and injured Floridians do not have to travel long distances for treatments. Emergency rooms in many of our urban areas are over-utilized because often times it takes too long to get appointments for routine medical care. Specialists are needed across the state, as are options to access urgent, but non-life threatening, conditions outside of a hospital setting. What do you do at midnight when you get sick? Sometimes there is only one place to go – the emergency room. But that may not be the most appropriate place.

Technology offers the opportunity to increase access to robust provider networks at lower costs. While in-person visits are essential for many conditions, others are quite conducive to remote appointments, convenient to patients and practitioners alike. Telehealth provides many opportunities, particularly with mental health.

Florida's health systems are constantly innovating and working to develop solutions to issues of cost and access. Free-market principles show us that the private sector can innovate in ways government could never imagine. What government can do is facilitate the exploration and implementation of innovative technologies and delivery models that increase efficiency, reduce strain on the health care workforce, improve patient outcomes, expand public access to care, and reduce costs for patients and taxpayers without impacting the quality of patient care.

Our dedicated staff, led by Allie Cleary, our Senior Policy Advisor on Health Care, and I have been meeting with stakeholders and collecting input and suggestions all summer. Many Senators have held similar meetings of their own. There are so many great ideas. Now it is the time to narrow down all of the ideas and put forward patient-focused innovations that improve access and options so more Floridians can live healthy. We can leverage communal insight to see what is working, and where we can improve the delivery and cost of health care with an eye toward prevention and early intervention that helps people live healthier.

On Tuesday, November 14, at 4:00 p.m., Chair Burton will hold a workshop to begin the process of fine tuning ideas, putting pen to paper, and of course, hearing more input from stakeholders. No other meetings are scheduled during this block, so every Senator has the opportunity to watch or attend the workshop.

I look forward to working together on this important initiative, and to seeing you all next week.