

02-26 Policy Matters

Subject: Investing in Our Communities, Expanding Access to Care, and Marking Milestones

Preheader: Here, Policy Matters. Learn the latest from UPMC's Government Affairs team.



This month's edition of *Policy Matters* focuses on a variety of health policy topics such as the 340B Drug Pricing Program, the Rural Health Transformation Program, and the Consolidated Appropriations Act.

We also share updates on expanded access to care across Pennsylvania and New York, from tele-palliative services and advanced cancer treatment technology to new transplant evaluation offerings and mobile health units serving women and families.

Finally, we spotlight community partnerships and recent advancements in supporting patients across our regions.

Together, these stories reflect UPMC's ongoing commitment to improving health, advancing opportunity, and meeting community needs with compassion and innovation.



One Year Remembrance of Officer Andrew Duarte and UPMC Memorial

On Feb. 21, UPMC and the York community hosted a candlelight vigil honoring the legacy of Officer Andrew Duarte. The vigil marked the first anniversary of Officer Duarte's sacrifice for our safety. Those who gathered honored his legacy of bravery and celebrated UPMC Memorial's spirit of resiliency.

Together, the UPMC and York communities have supported one another, carried forward Officer Duarte's spirit of service, and continued our mission with strength, unity, and resolve. This vigil was not only a moment of remembrance, but a testament to the courage we share as we move forward — together.



Health Policy in Focus



340B Drug Pricing Program

UPMC leaders met with key federal policymakers — including U.S. Rep. John Joyce, MD, U.S. Sen. John Fetterman, U.S. Rep. Dan Meuser, U.S. Rep. GT Thompson, U.S. Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, and U.S. Sen. Dave McCormick — to reaffirm the vital role of the 340B Drug Pricing Program in sustaining care for communities across Pennsylvania.

Discussions highlighted how 340B supports rural hospitals, many of which operate on negative margins, and enables critical investments in patient services and access to affordable medications. UPMC emphasized concerns with recent federal actions affecting the program. We urged continued congressional oversight to protect 340B's stability for patients, providers, and vulnerable populations. Patti Jackson-Gehris, president of UPMC North Central Pa. and UPMC Williamsport, was one of the leaders onsite and **spoke about the importance of advocating for this critical funding and what it means for rural patients and communities.**

Rural Health Transformation Program

UPMC continues to engage state partners as Pennsylvania moves toward implementing the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). The RHTP will direct \$193 million in its first year to strengthen care in rural communities.

As the Commonwealth finalizes its plan, UPMC is emphasizing how RHTP can accelerate existing initiatives already underway across our rural hospitals. Those include expanding access to essential services, advancing workforce and technology investments, and supporting long-term sustainability efforts.

With many rural hospitals facing significant financial strain, ensuring these funds are directed to providers most affected by recent federal payment changes remains critical. UPMC will continue partnering with the Commonwealth as implementation moves forward to strengthen access to care and long-term sustainability in rural communities.

Consolidated Appropriations Act

UPMC welcomes the recent passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act. The act includes a series of critical health extenders that strengthen hospital stability and advance key initiatives already underway across our system.

The legislation provides essential support through extensions of Medicaid DSH, Medicare Dependent Hospital, and Low-Volume Hospital payments. These are lifelines for many Pennsylvania hospitals facing persistent financial strain. Continued telehealth and Hospital at Home flexibilities will further enable UPMC to expand access, innovate care delivery, and meet patients where they are.

We appreciate lawmakers' support and the meaningful impact these provisions will have on our communities.



Community Commitment in Action



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UPMC Provides Donation for Pittsburgh's EMS Fleet

Following a historic winter storm that swept across Pittsburgh in late January, UPMC announced a \$10 million contribution to the City of Pittsburgh to support the replacement of the city's aging fleet of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) vehicles and equipment. This contribution will be used to purchase nine new ambulances and one rescue truck this year, and a similar amount of equipment in 2027.

City of Pittsburgh Mayor Corey O'Connor called the contribution transformative.

"UPMC saw what was happening, approached us and stepped up to partner with us on this game-changing investment," Mayor O'Connor said. "Their leadership sets the tone for what it means to invest in the well-being of our residents."

[Learn more](#)



Expanding Opportunity & Developing Tomorrow's Workforce



Celebrating the Development of the Health Care Workforce: Freedom House 2.0's February Graduation

On Feb. 13, a cohort of 12 individuals celebrated their graduation from the Freedom House 2.0 program, as well as the special 5-year milestone since the program began in 2021. The ceremony brought together Pittsburgh Mayor Corey O'Connor, State Rep. Aerion Abney, Pittsburgh EMS Chief Amera Gilchrist, and John Moon, former Freedom House emergency medical technician and retired assistant chief of Pittsburgh Emergency Medical Services. This graduating class marks the fifth year of UPMC Health Plan's Freedom House 2.0 program, which prepares students for careers in emergency medical services while strengthening neighborhood-based care in the community where the modern EMS movement began.



UPMC Mercy School of Nursing at UPMC Altoona Welcomes New Director Jennifer Kowalkowski

Jennifer Kowalkowski, PhD, was appointed as director of the UPMC Mercy School of Nursing at UPMC Altoona, effective Jan. 26. Her appointment marks a significant step in the school's commitment to providing high-quality nursing education and training.



Strengthening Regional Partnerships & Economic Vitality

UPMC and Maryland Physicians Care Announce \$2 Million in Community Donations

UPMC Western Maryland and Maryland Physicians Care gathered with local organizations to announce awards totaling \$2 million across 11 community groups.

As part of this investment, UPMC Western Maryland recently contributed \$250,000 to the Western Maryland Food Bank. Additional funds will support a range of community needs, including scholarships, facility improvements, program development, and general outreach initiatives, ensuring meaningful impact across the region.

[Learn more](#)



UPMC Participated in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Annual Point-in-Time Count

Every January, communities across the country participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual Point-in-Time Count. The count is a one-night effort to estimate the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a community.

A total of 300 volunteers from local companies, including the UPMC Center for Social Impact and Community Care Behavioral Health Organization, along with other nonprofits and universities, supported the event as volunteer partners.



UPMC Veterans Care Leader Meets with Mechanicsburg Mayor, Encompass CEO to Discuss Regional Support for Service Members

Marc Migala, director of Veterans Care Services at UPMC, recently met with the newly appointed mayor of Mechanicsburg and the CEO of Encompass Rehabilitation Hospital to discuss initiatives aimed at enhancing support for military members and veterans in the region. This meeting represents an important step toward continuing to strengthen collaboration and increasing visibility for veterans' care coordination throughout central Pennsylvania.



UPMC Showcases Integrated Sports Medicine Model to State and Federal Leaders at UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex

Pennsylvania Sen. Devlin Robinson, Pennsylvania Reps. Marci Mustello and Tim O'Neal, and Sam DeMarco from U.S. Sen. Dave McCormick's office recently toured the UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex in Cranberry Township, Pa. They explored clinical spaces, strength and conditioning areas, and dedicated UPMC Magee-Womens and UPMC Children's specialties.

The tour showcased UPMC's integrated sports medicine model and reinforced our commitment to serving athletes, families, and community patients through advanced orthopaedics, rehabilitation, imaging, primary care, and sports performance services.



Advancing Community Health & Addressing Social Needs

UPMC Helping Combat Food Insecurity with Mobile Food Pantry in Lycoming County

UPMC is a key partner in launching the new Rescuer's Reach Mobile Food Pantry. The pantry is helping to bring healthy food directly to residents facing food insecurity in Lycoming County.

By supporting the mobile pantry, UPMC is helping reach populations that otherwise struggle to receive proper nutritional care while also connecting community members with additional health and wellness resources.

"Food insecurity is absolutely a health issue; it's a significant need in every one of our communities, and so to be able to get this food to people where they are who are in need is so important," says Patti Jackson-Gehris, president, UPMC in North Central Pa. and UPMC Williamsport.

[**Learn more**](#)



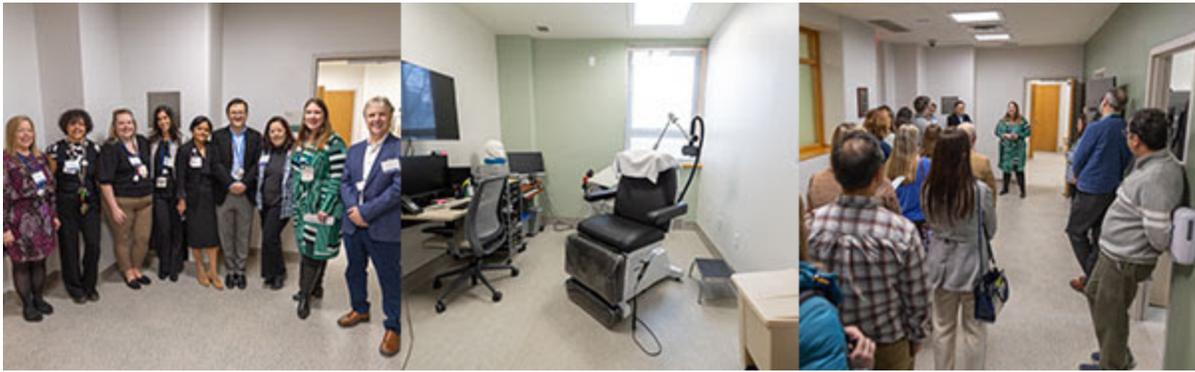
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UPMC Hamot Announces Launch of Community Nurse Liaison Program

Leaders from UPMC Hamot and the Erie VA Medical Center signed a veterans' care pledge recognizing the start of the VA-UPMC Community Nurse Liaison Program at UPMC Hamot.

The Community Nurse Liaison Program model consists of embedding VA registered nurses into UPMC Hamot and seven other UPMC hospitals to streamline the care of veterans from admission to discharge. Coordinating continued care — including physical therapy, prescriptions, and follow-up appointments — by working hand in hand with the community case managers is also part of the community nurse liaison role.

[Learn more](#)



UPMC Center for Interventional Psychiatry Opens Newly Renovated Suite, Enhancing Patient Access and Support

UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital recently celebrated the opening of the newly renovated suite for the Center for Interventional Psychiatry (CIP). The Feb. 5 ribbon-cutting welcomed staff and guests to explore the updated space and learn about CIP's advanced treatment offerings, including electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), ketamine services, and the newly introduced SAINT[®] Neuromodulation Therapy, the first of its kind available in Pennsylvania.

Clinical leaders Daniel Varon, MD, Tejal Bhojak, MD, and Marie Anne Gebara, MD, shared how the expanded suite will enhance patient access and support innovative care for conditions such as treatment-resistant depression and catatonia.



Expanding Access to Care

- [UPMC's Tele-Palliative Care Program Expands into Western New York](#)
- [UPMC Passavant Enhances Cancer Care with New Linear Accelerator](#)
- [UPMC Washington Offers Local Lung and Kidney Transplant Evaluations](#)
- [UPMC Unveils Women's Mobile Health Unit Serving Central Pa. Counties](#)



Leadership Highlights



UPMC's Rob Ritson Recognized at City & State PA's 'Who's Who in Government Relations' Event

Rob Ritson, senior director of Government Affairs at UPMC, was honored at *City & State PA's* 2026 "Who's Who in Government Relations" event for his role in serving as a key figure in helping UPMC communicate legislative priorities to elected officials at all levels.

Stay Informed

UPMC's Government Affairs Team is committed to delivering relevant and timely news on the latest health care trends, medical research, and clinical developments as they relate to public health issues.

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