

## **OIG Report Highlights Hospital Strains Caused by the Pandemic**

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The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG) recently conducted a “pulse survey,” consisting of brief interviews of front-line hospital administrators, to assess the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on patient care, staff, and communities. From February 22<sup>nd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the OIG surveyed 320 hospitals across 45 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The interviews focused on three key questions:

1. What are your most difficult challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic right now, and what strategies have you been using to address the challenges?
2. What are your organization’s greatest concerns going forward?
3. How can the government best support hospitals?

Observations highlighted in the resulting [report](#) include the following:

1. Meeting the needs of COVID-19 patients and uncertainty about future caseloads created challenges.
2. Patients have delayed or forgone care due to a lack of trust in hospital safety.
3. Mental and behavioral health care needs have increased.
4. Longstanding operational challenges at rural hospitals have worsened.
5. Existing disparities in access to care and health outcomes have been exacerbated.
6. The use of telehealth has expanded, but it cannot cover all aspects of health care delivery.
7. Increased workloads and stress have led to staff burnout and, in some cases, trauma.
8. High turnover among and competition for medical staff have created staffing shortages.
9. Differences in government guidelines regarding vaccines made the determination of eligibility more complicated.
10. Some hospital staff and members of the community were hesitant or declined to get vaccinated.

11. Ensuring access to vaccinations for rural, senior, and low-income populations required additional steps.
12. The unpredictable and insufficient supply of vaccines caused frustration.
13. A steady supply of affordable, high-quality personal protective equipment was difficult to maintain.
14. Operational costs have risen dramatically while revenues have declined.

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