



Kansas Hospital
ASSOCIATION

Opinion Editorial

January 10, 2019

For further information:

Cindy Samuelson

(785) 233-7436; (785) 249-1727

csamuelson@kha-net.org

Working together for a healthier Kansas: An open letter to Governor-Elect Laura Kelly

Dear Governor-Elect Kelly:

At the Kansas Hospital Association, our vision is Optimal Health for Kansans – and we know this vision is shared by many Kansans who want the same for themselves and each other. As you begin your term as governor of our state, I would like to share several ways we can all work toward that goal.

A common refrain among observers of the Kansas health care system is the need to improve the behavioral health continuum of care for our citizens. As you well know, behavioral health is a multi-faceted challenge that involves many different sectors of our state, and we must work together to better meet the high demand for timely care and treatment.

Additionally, the recent closure of Mercy Hospital in Fort Scott has prompted more discussion about how we can best support health care delivery in rural parts of our state. Rural health care is another issue with many different angles, and the need to take a hard look at more innovative models of care is becoming increasingly apparent.

Improving the KanCare program is another significant legislative priority for 2019. Impending transitions with the Medicaid managed care organizations are creating new obstacles and increasing confusion about the program. KanCare providers and beneficiaries deserve an effective Medicaid program that is devoid of bureaucratic hurdles.

Yet another concern is our state's continuing decline in health rankings over the years. When the United Health Foundation first started America's Health Rankings in the early 1990s, Kansas ranked in the top ten of all states for overall health measures. By 2000, we had fallen to 20th. In 2010 we were 23rd; in 2017 we were 25th, and last year we were 27th. Many factors have led to this decline, not the least of which is the fact that Kansas has never had any kind of official, statewide effort to focus on these measures and reverse the downward trend.

While these and other health issues are important in their own rights, one solution ties them all together: expanding KanCare. An expanded Medicaid program will benefit Kansas

economically while making health care more accessible for hardworking, low-income Kansans. I believe it is the policy decision that would have the most positive impact on the health of Kansans.

Governor-elect Kelly, we look forward to working with you on these and other important issues affecting the health of our state. Your previous support in the Kansas Senate has been incredibly important. Your leadership as governor will be crucial as we move forward, united in the vision of optimal health for all Kansans.

Sincerely,

Tom Bell
Kansas Hospital Association

***About the Author:** Tom Bell is the president and CEO of Kansas Hospital Association, a voluntary, non-profit organization existing to be the leading advocate and resource for members. KHA membership includes 225 member facilities, of which 123 are full-service, community hospitals. Founded in 1910, KHA's vision is: "Optimal Health for Kansans."*

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