**CHA Sample Op-Ed: “’Perfect Storm’ Impacts Pediatric Capacity”**

Children’s hospitals throughout the nation, including [CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL], are facing a perfect storm of crises that are straining our capacity as essential providers.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the nation’s health care system as a whole and in [COMMUNITY XX], children’s hospitals are facing a converging set of unprecedented challenges.

Children are being infected by COVID-19 in record numbers, including those who are unvaccinated, those who are too young to receive a vaccine and those with serious underlying health conditions. More than [180,000 pediatric infections](https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/) nationwide were reported last week with 2,100 of those children requiring hospitalization according to the CDC.

CUSTOMIZE AS NEEDED: Here at [CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL], we are currently caring for [XX] number of patients with a primary diagnosis of COVID-19, which represents a [X%] increase over winter admissions for the virus. To better protect our kids, we strongly encourage everyone eligible for a vaccine to receive one.

A second challenge is the sudden and severe wave of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) that began earlier than expected. RSV is a serious ailment that can be particularly dangerous for infants and toddlers whose air pathways are smaller. It is typically seen and spread during the winter, but with masking and shutdowns last year, there was very little transmission.

At present, we are treating [XX] number of children for RSV and other serious respiratory illnesses. To prevent viral infections, including COVID-19, we urge masking indoors, avoiding large gatherings and adhering to safe hygiene practices including frequent handwashing.

A third challenge is the ongoing children’s mental health crisis, which was underway well before the pandemic, but was further exacerbated over the past 18 months. Mental health cases in children age 3 to 17 are at their highest levels in recent years, and since the beginning of the pandemic are representing a larger proportion of all cases according to the Children’s Hospital Association.

CUSTOMIZE AS NEEDED WITH CAPACITY DATA: At [CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL], we are paying close attention to the rise in suicidal ideation and self-injury, admissions for which have increased [X%] since the start of the pandemic.

Finally, this convergence of unprecedented challenges has put a significant strain on the talented and highly trained professionals who are dedicated to serving families in our community. Caring for every child who seeks care and working with their worried families has taken a toll on health workers under the best of circumstances. Work stress and “burn out” make recruitment and retention of this workforce even more challenging. CUSTOMIZE WITH DATA (IF COMFORTABLE)

Throughout this pandemic, we have worked closely with health officials at the federal, state and local levels. We have supported and advocated for stronger masking and vaccination guidance and helped to educate vulnerable families on the important steps they can take to protect their own health. Children’s hospitals have been trusted partners with our communities, but now we need assistance.

In the near-term, we need federal authorities to release provider relief funds and direct them toward children’s hospitals in need. This financial assistance would help us address immediate staffing and capacity needs as more and more families seek out care.

Over the long-term, we need governments at every level to consider the unique challenges children’s hospitals face as we continue caring for millions of children every year. While the health impacts of the coronavirus have been greatest on the elderly and adults, the long-term impacts of this pandemic will be felt by children and as their health care providers, we must be ready and prepared to help them.