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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ADMISSIONS TO FLORIDA HOSPITALS SURGE AS FLORIDA SENATE SEEKS
MEDICAID CUTS ELIMINATING HEALTHCARE COVERAGE FOR THOUSANDS**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., April 15, 2004 – Fueled by an increase in Medicaid and Medicare patients, admissions to Florida hospitals are growing faster than the state's population, the Florida Hospital Association (FHA) reported today.

At the same time patient loads are climbing, the Florida Senate is planning Medicaid budget cuts that would eliminate healthcare coverage for tens of thousands of patients and further strain safety net hospitals.

New data shows that statewide hospital admissions are rising by an average of 2.7 percent a year, while Florida's population is growing by 2.3 percent annually, the FHA said. During the 12 months that ended September 30, 2003, the state's acute care hospitals admitted 2.17 million patients for a total of 10.7 million patient days – a 2.4 percent increase in patient days over 2002.

Since 2000, Medicaid patient admissions to Florida hospitals have risen by 27 percent, while Medicare patient admissions have grown by 12 percent and HMO/PPO admissions have climbed seven percent, the new data shows. The only decrease in admissions occurred in the category of traditional commercial patients, which dropped 20 percent. In the same period, hospitals saw a 17 percent increase in self-pay and charity patients.

"Hospitals can't continue to shoulder the burden of the uninsured alone," said Wayne NeSmith, President of the 230-member Florida Hospital Association. "Our Legislature and state policymakers must work together to find a solution to expand coverage to the uninsured."

The Fort Walton Beach area in the Panhandle saw the state's largest jump in hospital admissions, at 7 percent. Meanwhile, Panama City, Gainesville, Lakeland/Winter Haven, Orlando and the Melbourne/Titusville/Palm Bay area all saw admissions rise by five percent over the previous year.

The number of citizens seeking hospital care is increasing at the same time state Senators are proposing Medicaid budget cuts that would eliminate healthcare coverage for tens of thousands of Florida's neediest citizens – the catastrophically ill and low-income pregnant women – and cost Florida's communities \$416 million.

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Admissions to Florida hospitals surge

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The Senate is proposing cuts in three areas that would be especially harmful to trauma centers, the state's teaching hospitals, and facilities that specialize in care to children and rural communities. These cuts include eliminating the Medically Needy program, which covers 35,000 catastrophically ill patients; removing 7,000 pregnant women and their children from Medicaid eligibility; and capping Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals at a level below the actual cost of providing care.

"The trend is clear – more and more citizens are seeking care at Florida hospitals, which are already straining to meet the needs of our growing population," said Wayne NeSmith, President of the 230-member FHA. "At the same time, state senators are planning Medicaid cuts that jeopardize coverage for tens of thousands of people in need and shift the costs of care to our hospitals and our local communities."

Nearly 60 percent of patients come to the emergency department prior to admission to the hospital, the FHA reported. About 44 percent of patients statewide are 65 or older, although admissions for elderly patients have decreased since 2000, and patients under 65 are using more hospital services.

Not only are Medicare and Medicaid patient admissions rising, but these patients also typically stay in the hospital longer than other patients. Medicare patients had the highest average length of stay in the hospital, at 5.7 days, while Medicaid patients had average stays of 4.6 days. The shortest average lengths of stays were recorded by HMO/PPO patients, at 3.8 days.

Florida currently ranks fourth in the nation in the number of uninsured, with one-in-five citizens lacking coverage. Ironically, the Senate's proposed Medicaid cuts will increase the number of uninsured in a year in which state lawmakers have devoted considerable attention to finding new ways to provide affordable health coverage to more citizens. One of the consequences of this new cost shift will be an increase in upward pressure on health insurance premiums.

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Editor's note: Detailed statistics on admissions to each acute care hospital in Florida are available through the Florida Hospital Association. Copies of this news release and the *FHA Data Report* used to compile the release are available at: http://www.fha.org/newsroom/index_html or you may download the data brief directly at: <http://www.fha.org/databrief9-03.pdf>