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MEDIA STATEMENT

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California Hospitals Praise Adoption of New Scientifically Based Regulations for Earthquake Safety

by

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The California Hospital Association (CHA) applauds today's decision by the California Building Standards Commission to approve new regulations improving the methodology for more accurately determining the seismic risk of the state's hospital buildings. The decision to allow the use of HAZUS, a new federally developed modeling technology, will help preserve access to care for millions of Californians.

The goal of having earthquake compliant hospital buildings is a worthy public policy objective which has been long-supported by CHA and our member hospitals. We all want our local community hospitals to be able to withstand and remain operational following a major earthquake. By implementing the new HAZUS methodology, resources can be directed towards ensuring that the most vulnerable buildings are addressed first.

Current law requires all hospital buildings deemed to be at risk of collapse in an earthquake to meet new seismic standards by January 1, 2013 or be closed to patient care. An April 2001 report by the Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development (OSHPD) found that nearly 40 percent of California's hospital buildings were in this category. This assessment, however, was made in the late 1990s using what is now considered to be outdated and inadequate technology.

HAZUS represents the latest technological advancement in determining earthquake risk. It factors in not only the age of the building and the type of construction but also soil composition, distance from an earthquake fault, ground motion and other considerations. By conducting a more accurate re-evaluation of hospital buildings using the sophisticated HAZUS modeling technology, it is projected that at least half of the buildings will be found to pose a much lower risk than was originally estimated. These buildings will be reclassified into a lower-risk category – and will have until 2030 to meet the state's highest structural requirements for earthquake safety.

Those buildings that remain in the high-risk category according to the HAZUS methodology must meet the new hospital seismic requirements by January 1, 2013 or face closure.

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HAZUS will not compromise safety for patients, workers or visitors. Rather, it is a proven, scientifically-based technology that will ensure patients continue to have access to the care they need while allowing policymakers and hospitals to focus on addressing the highest-risk buildings first. Combined with a more judicious use of limited capital resources, HAZUS will enable hospitals to continue caring for patients in a safe and cost-effective manner.

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