

PROVIDER TYPES

Critical Access Hospitals

Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) are facilities that provide limited outpatient and inpatient hospital services to rural residents, ensuring that essential healthcare services are available in geographically isolated areas. As of April 2024, there are 1,368 CAHs across the United States and 38 in California. ¹ See the [Flex Monitoring Team Critical Access Hospital Locations List](#) for a current list of CAHs by state.

The CAH designation is given to eligible rural hospitals by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and is intended to stabilize the financial vulnerability of operating in these areas.

These hospitals are focused on providing emergency care, inpatient care, and stabilizing patients for transfer to larger facilities as needed. CAHs are critical to maintaining healthcare access and improving health outcomes in rural communities. CAHs receive cost-based reimbursement for Medicare services and are allowed flexible staffing and services to meet community needs as permitted under state licensure laws.

CAHs must provide 24-hour emergency department services, be a 35-mile drive from other hospitals (15 miles for mountainous areas or in absence of main roadways), meet 96-hour length of stay requirements, and have 25 or fewer acute care inpatient beds. CAH designation and program requirements have been amended since their establishment in 1997. For specific CAH requirement and reimbursement guidance for California, visit the [California State Office of Rural Health](#) webpage.

For more information and resources for CAHs, see the [Rural Health Information Hub Critical Access Hospitals](#) webpage.

Reference

1 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (n.d.). Critical Access Hospitals. Retrieved from: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/health-safety-standards/certification-compliance/critical-access-hospitals>