

CHA Style Guide

These guidelines are intended to be a reference for preparing CHA's written documents, and are primarily based on Associated Press (AP) style. This is not an all-inclusive guide.

Contact the Communications department — communications@calhospital.org — if you have questions about the guide.

What's new in this update?

- More guidance on commonly confused words, capitalization and formatting of bulleted lists.
- Expanded tips for *CHA News* articles.
- Commonly used acronyms.

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ACADEMIC DEGREES

If possible, incorporate academic degrees into sentence and spell out.

Example: Andrea Hoch, administrative director of the Division of Workers' Compensation, received her juris doctorate from the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law.

Academic Titles

Abbreviations can be used for some academic degrees, including *PhD*, *RN*, *MD*, *JD* and *DrPH*. When used after a name, set off degree with commas. Do not use periods in the abbreviation.

Example: David Brailer, MD, PhD, is charged with carrying out the President's goal of widespread adoption of interoperable electronic health records within 10 years.

Use lowercase and an apostrophe in *bachelor's degree* and *master's degree*.

Example: The bill would provide educational grants to registered nurses seeking a master's degree or doctorate in nursing.

ACRONYMS

First reference: First reference should be spelled out, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Generally, the acronym is then used for all other references. If reference is made only once, an acronym is not needed.

Example: A new report released by the American Hospital Association (AHA) can be found on the AHA website.

Autocorrect: Watch out for acronyms that Word autocorrects.

Examples: CNA (to CAN) or EHR (to HER).

Plural Acronyms: To form a plural acronym, add a lower case “s” (no apostrophe).

Example: The afternoon agenda will feature two breakout sessions tailored to medical rehabilitation and distinct-part skilled-nursing facilities (SNFs).

Possessive Acronyms: To form a possessive acronym when that acronym ends in “S”, add only an apostrophe.

Example: CHA appreciates CMS’ efforts to update outdated regulations.

To form a possessive acronym when that acronym does not end in “S,” add an apostrophe followed by “s.”

Example: AHA’s website highlights its annual membership meeting.

Commonly used acronyms:

- ACA – Affordable Care Act
- AWI – adjusted wage index
- CDC – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- CLABSI – central line-associated bloodstream infection
- CMP – civil monetary penalty
- CMS – Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- DME – durable medical equipment
- DRG – diagnosis related group
- EMTALA – Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act
- FY – fiscal year
- HCAHPS – Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems
- HIPAA – Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
- IPPS – inpatient prospective payment system
- MAC – Medicare administrative contractor
- NQF – National Quality Forum
- OPSS – outpatient prospective payment system
- PSO – patient safety organization
- RAC – recovery audit contractor

BULLETED LISTS

Capitalize all items in the list.

Use a period after items that are full sentences.

Do not use punctuation if the items are not full sentences.

Do not add an extra space between bulleted items.

Use consistent forms of grammar to ensure the sentence structure is parallel.

Example:

Incorrect: The President traveled to several cities *meeting* voters, *to give* speeches, and *ask for* campaign funds.

Correct: The President traveled to several cities *meeting* voters, *giving* speeches, and *asking for* campaign funds.

Do not number lists unless they are instructions.

Example:

The comprehensive, 700-page manual includes chapters on:

- Federal and state false claims acts
- Submission of accurate claims information
- Physician self-referral laws

Example:

In addition to identifying the attack methods used, the bulletin's assessment offers a series of best practices, including:

- Never click on links or attachments in unexpected emails.
- Verify any unusual email from a known sender by contacting them directly.
- Always verify requests to update computers with IT staff.

CAPITALIZATION

Nouns: Avoid capitalization of nouns unless used as a proper name.

Examples: disproportionate share hospitals, sustainable growth rate, critical access hospitals, suspense file, federal fiscal year

Proper Nouns: Capitalize proper nouns.

Examples: Democratic Party, CHA Board of Trustees, Rural Health Care Symposium

Plurals: Lowercase subsequent shortened references and in all plural cases.

Example: The CHA Board of Trustees voted to oppose Proposition 89. The board also appointed an ad hoc advisory group to determine the needs of provider-based clinics. In addition, the CHA and CAHHS boards met with Joint Commission President/CEO Dennis O’Leary.

Political Parties: Capitalize *Democrat*, *Liberal* and *Republican* when they refer to a specific party or its members.

Example: Democrats held 48 of 80 Assembly seats headed into the election, and appear to have maintained their 48 to 32 majority over Republicans.

Political Philosophy: Lowercase these words when they refer to political philosophy.

Example: Debates are an important part of the democratic process.

Legislature: Always capitalize Legislature, even if the state name is dropped.

Example: The Legislature adjourned Aug. 31.

Capitol: Capitol should be capitalized when referring to specific state capitol buildings or the building in Washington, D.C. (or Capitol Hill). **Note:** *Capitol* refers to the building, while *capital* refers to the city and is not capitalized.

Example: During CHA’s Health Policy Legislative Day, attendees will meet with legislators at the Capitol.

Courts: *Court of Appeal* and *District Court of Appeal* should be capitalized on first reference; use *appellate court* (lowercase) in subsequent references.

Regional Associations: Always capitalize Regional Associations.

Example: CHA and the Regional Associations work together with California hospitals, the American Hospital Association and other organizations to represent patients and hospitals at the federal, state and local levels.

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Census: *U.S. Census Bureau* should always be capitalized; when referring to the *census*, use lowercase.

Example: The U.S. Census Bureau's latest quarterly services report does not include several other components of the health care system, such as pharmaceuticals and other medical products.

Example: Revised census figures show that year-over-year health care spending increased 7.1 percent in the first quarter of this year.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Words like *Congress*, *Legislature*, *Assembly*, *Senate*, *team*, *faculty*, *committee* and *group* usually take singular verbs and pronouns. They express the idea that the group works as one unit.

Example: The new organization has a small staff that provides leadership and interacts with hospitals.

Example: The Legislature could lose one-third of its current members.

To emphasize the individual members of the group, or if the singular verb seems awkward, revise the sentence for a plural verb.

Example: Committee members do not agree on this issue.

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

Affect/Effect: The verb *affect* means “to influence”; the noun *effect* means “the result of an action.” These are the most common uses of the words.

Example: CHA is concerned about how the law will affect hospitals. We don’t know what the effect will be.

Fewer/Less: Use *fewer* for things that can be counted. Use *less* for things that can’t be counted.

Example: The region has fewer hospitals than it needs. Many hospitals have less blood than they need.

It’s/Its: *It’s* is a contraction meaning “it is” or “it has.” *Its* means “belonging to it” and does not include an apostrophe, even though it is possessive.

More than/Over: Use *more than* instead of *over* when referring to a quantity.

Example: There is no cap on rural referral centers – large urban hospitals with more than 100 beds or rural hospitals with more than 500 beds.

That /Which: Use *that* for essential clauses that are important to the meaning of a sentence, without commas. Use *which* for nonessential clauses where dropping the clause does not lose the meaning of the sentence, with commas.

Example: The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved the Medi-Cal managed care expansion rates that cover the period of Jan. 1 – June 30, 2014, of the 2014-16 hospital fee program.

Example: CHA urges hospital executives to send a letter opposing AB 2467 (Gomez, D-Stockton), which is expected to be heard April 12 in the Assembly Health Committee.

LEGISLATION

Legislative Titles: The following titles should be abbreviated when used before a full name: *Rep.*, *Reps.*, *Sen.*, *Sens.*, *Gov.* and *Rev.*

Exception: These titles are not abbreviated in memoranda and letters.

Example: Hospital leaders met with members of the California congressional delegation, including Sen. Barbara Boxer (D) and Reps. Jerry Lewis (R) and Pete Stark (D).

Do not abbreviate *Assemblymember* or *President*.

Members of Congress: For members of Congress, abbreviations can be used for party and state if not incorporated into sentence.

Example: Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) urged House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) to schedule a vote on the issue.

Legislature Members: For members of the state Legislature, include an abbreviation for party, along with city information, after each legislator's name.

Example: Attending the breakfast reception were Sen. Dick Ackerman (R-Irvine), and Assemblymembers John Benoit (R-Palm Desert) and Patty Berg (D-Eureka).

Bill References: The first reference to a state bill should include the author's last name, short form of party affiliation and city in parentheses.

Example: On Aug. 31, the Legislature passed AB 774 (Chan, D-Oakland).

Subsequent references to bills do not need to include author's last name, party affiliation or city.

When referring to a bill from a previous session, specify the year.

Example: Cal/OSHA formed the advisory committee after passage of AB 1202 (Chapter 678, Statutes of 2013)

NUMBERS

Whole numbers: Spell out whole numbers below 10; use figures for 10 and above.

Example: CMS proposes creating nine additional RUG-III groups and adding them to the existing 44 RUGs.

Exception: Always spell out the number if used at the beginning of a sentence.

Example: Forty-seven members have registered for the webinar.

Ages: Always use figures for ages.

Example: The report studies the impact on families with children under 10 years old.

Millions: Always use figures when referencing a number in the millions, billions or trillions.

Example: Recent reports estimate that 1 million people signed up for health plans through insurance marketplaces in 2016.

Phone numbers: Phone numbers should include area code, in parentheses, and a hyphen between the first three figures and the last four. **Note:** This is CHA preference, not an Associated Press rule.

Example: For more information, contact Anne O'Rourke at (202) 488-4494.

Dates

Use figures for dates (June 5), rather than ordinals (June 5th). Also, use months and dates. Do not precede a date with the day of the week.

Example: The seminar is set for June 5 in Sacramento.

Years: If the year is included with the month and date, place a comma between the date and year as well as after the year. **Note:** Only include the year if the reference is *not* to the current year.

Example: For more information, see the May 12, 2015, *Federal Register*.

Do not place a comma between month and year if used without a specific date.

Example: The report was published in January 2005.

Exception for CHA News only: Abbreviate *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.* and *Dec.* Spell out when used alone.

Example: The bill was signed into law August 2006 and goes into effect Jan. 1, 2007.

Times

Use figures for time of day, except *noon* and *midnight*. Do not capitalize *noon*.

Example: The conference begins at 8:30 a.m. and breaks for lunch at noon.

Using *morning* with *a.m.* or *afternoon/evening* with *p.m.* is redundant.

Example: The tour begins daily at 4 p.m.

When providing a time range, use *a.m.* or *p.m.* after each figure, unless both times are in the morning/evening.

Example: The seminar will be held April 5 from 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

Example: The webinar will take place from 9-11 a.m.

Include time zones when providing a time or time range for a webinar or out-of-state event.

Example: The webinar will be held from 4-6 p.m. (PT).

When including times at the top of the hour, do not include :00.

Example: The meeting will begin at 4 p.m. at the Sacramento County Library.

Percentages

Always use figures with percentages. Spell out *percent*; do not use %.

Exception: *Percent* does not need to be spelled out in headings or subheadings.

Example: Approximately 40 percent of the state's 2,700 hospital buildings must either be retrofitted or rebuilt to meet the 2008/2013 construction standards.

For amounts less than 1 percent, precede the decimal with a zero.

Example: The cost of living rose 0.6 percent.

Do not use “-” or parentheses for a negative percentage.

Example: CMS estimates that the program's implementation would result in an overall decrease in drug spending of negative 2.3 percent.

PUNCTUATION

Use only one space between sentences.

Commas

Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not place a comma before *and* in a simple series.

Example: The Proposition 86 packets include posters, fact sheets, a sample letter to the editor and a sample newsletter article.

Use a comma before *and* or *but* joining two clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence.

Example: Congress is expected to continue examining these issues, and CHA encourages all hospitals to be in contact with their members of Congress.

When using *which* to introduce a nonessential phrase or clause, precede it with a comma.

Example: CHA's top priority for the November ballot is enactment of the Tobacco Tax Act of 2006, which would raise the state's tobacco tax by \$2.60 per pack of cigarettes.

Do not precede *that* with a comma when used to introduce an essential phrase or clause.

Example: CHA is working to find a solution that will achieve the best results for the largest number of hospitals.

Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens are joiners, most commonly used to form compound modifiers (two or more words expressing a single concept) that precede a noun.

Example: The one-day seminar is tailored to behavioral health care providers.

Do not hyphenate *very* or adverbs ending in *ly*.

Example: The newly elected senator had a very prosperous year.

The following words/phrases almost always include hyphens:

- Distinct-part skilled-nursing facility
- Long-term care hospital
- Post-acute care
- Evidence-based
- Well-being
- Members-only
- Hospital-associated infection
- Not-for-profit hospitals
- Follow-up (if used as a noun; no hyphen if used as a verb)

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The following words/phrases should only include hyphens when immediately followed by a noun:

Site-neutral

Example: The two-year budget deal cuts Medicare payments by implementing a CHA-opposed site-neutral policy for new provider-based hospital outpatient departments.

Safety-net

Example: The upcoming webinar will explore the impact of technology-based treatment and recovery supports on primary care safety-net providers.

Example: California hospital leaders warn that the state's health care safety net is threatened by looming Medi-Cal budget cuts.

The following words/phrases should not include hyphens.

Email

Fundraising

Acute care hospital

Cosponsor

EN dashes are often used to indicate a range, such as dates or votes. Do not place a space on either side of an EN dash.

Example: The conference will be held July 7-10.

EM dashes indicate a sudden break in thought or parenthetical statement — and help set off text for emphasis. Place a space before and after an EM dash. **Note:** This is CHA-specific, not AP Style.

Example: CHA announced this week the creation of a new specialty center — the Center for Medical Rehabilitation Services — resulting from a merger between CHA and the medical division of the California Rehabilitation Association.

Quotes

When using quotes, commas and periods should be placed inside the quotation marks.

Example: In the recent April 2015 Institute of Medicine report, “Vital Signs: Core Metrics for Health and Health Care Progress,” researchers concluded that the vast — and constantly growing — number of quality measures that providers are required to track “limits their overall effectiveness.”

All other punctuation should not be included inside the quotation marks, unless it applies to the quoted material.

SPELLING PREFERENCES

Always use *CEO* rather than spelling out *chief executive officer*.

Listserve should always be spelled as one word, with an “e.”

Health care is two words, except when used as one word in an organization’s name.

Example: Rural Healthcare Center

Timeline is one word. *Time frame* is two words.

Always spell *adviser* with “er.”

Do not include an “s” at the end of *afterward* or *toward*.

Do not include “st” at the end of *among*.

Judgment should not be spelled with an “e.”

Taskforce should be spelled as one word.

Work group should be spelled as two words, except when used as one word in an organization’s name.

Example: Antineoplastic Drug Handling Workgroup

Market basket should always be two words.

Always use *All Facilities Letter* – capitalized, plural.

Use the phrase *dually-eligible individuals* rather than *dual eligibles*.

Always spell *payer* with “er.”

Assemblymember is one word.

TITLES

Job Titles

Capitalize formal titles immediately before a name. Do not separate the title from the name by a comma.

Example: CHA President/CEO C. Duane Dauner delivered the keynote address.

Titles that appear after a name or stand alone are *almost never* capitalized.

Exceptions: Governor, Secretary, President, Chair

Titles that appear after a name are set off with commas and are lowercase.

Example: Anne O'Rourke, senior vice president, federal relations, will answer questions after the call.

Exception: C. Duane Dauner, President/CEO

Composition Titles

Italicize titles of reports, books, magazines, television programs, reference works, court cases, etc. **Note:** This is CHA preference, not an Associated Press rule.

Example: From basic principles to specific procedures, the *Consent Manual* is your one-stop resource for all legal requirements related to patient consent.

Titles of legislation should not be italicized.

WEBSITES

When referencing a website, do not start a URL with *http://* unless *www* is not part of the web address.

Avoid using long URLs when possible. Try to incorporate hyperlinks into the text of a sentence.

Within a sentence, spell as *web page* – two words, lowercase – or *website* – one word, lowercase.

WRITING TIPS

Limit use of *regarding*; replace with *on* or *about*.

Example: Jack had questions *about* the Coordinate Care Initiative Stakeholder report.

Use third person narrative; refrain from using *I, we, you, their, our*, etc.

Minimize use of acronyms when possible.

Only use one space between sentences.

Avoid using passive voice.

Example: “CMS issued the report.” **NOT** “The report was issued by CMS.”

For emphasis, use **bold** font rather than underlined.

CHA NEWS WRITING GUIDELINES & TIPS

The daily *CHA News* is designed to give members a quick read of the day’s issues. A short section of the article — the headline and teaser — display in the newsletter while the rest of the content is available through a link or attachment. This means the headline and teaser play a critical role in grabbing members’ attention and helping them determine the articles they want/need to read.

What Makes a Good Headline?

Use “active” voice/structure, such as:

- CHA Prevails in Lawsuit to Access Public Records
- CHA President Meets With Congressional Leaders
- U.S. Supreme Court Rules in Medicaid Rate Cut Case

Keep short.

Use a subhead to draw attention to a key date or important fact.

What Belongs in Teaser?

The teaser captures the main point rather than the background. The exact content depends on the topic, but consider answering one of the following:

- What is the issue, challenge, legislation or regulation?
- What is the impact or implication – especially for hospitals?
- What action, if any, should hospitals take?
- What is CHA’s position?
- Who are the key players?
- When did/will this occur?

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- Where did/will this happen?

Other Tips for Teaser

- Keep sentences short.
- Avoid technical terms, if possible.

Headline & Intro Example

Application Deadline Extended for EHR Hardship Exception

Eligible hospitals and CAHs must apply by July 1

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has extended the application deadline for the Medicare EHR Incentive program hardship exception process to July 1 for eligible professionals, eligible hospitals and critical access hospitals (CAHs). The exceptions apply to the Medicare EHR program 2017 payment adjustments. The previous deadline was March 15 for eligible professionals and April 1 for eligible hospitals and CAHs. The hardship application and instructions are available on CMS' website.

CHA News Article Example

State Clarifies Regulatory Status of Certain Hazardous Waste Containers

Provides interpretation of EPA letter affecting California generators

Teaser – this part will show in the CHA News email:

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) recently published the attached letter clarifying the regulatory status of pharmaceutical-related hazardous waste generated by health care facilities in California — specifically, the impact of previous EPA guidance on California generators. While federal regulations allow hospitals to factor in only the weight of the RCRA P-listed hazardous waste residue when determining generator status and completing the hazardous waste manifest, the DTSC letter clarifies that California hospitals must consider the weight of P-listed waste containers in addition to the residue, unless the containers are properly cleaned — a time-consuming and costly process.

Break – the teaser plus the remainder of the article will display on the CHA website:

DTSC states that California's regulations on the definition of empty containers are currently more stringent than those of the federal EPA. The letter advises California health care facilities to include the total weight (of the container and the residue) on the hazardous waste manifest and states that this weight will count toward the monthly total to determine if the health care facility meets the one kilogram per month threshold for acute hazardous waste. The letter further advises health care facilities to be aware that DTSC will use the weight of the container and residue to calculate tonnages and collect annual generator fees.

CHA is not aware of any inspections, citations or investigations currently underway by DTSC or certified unified program agencies; any facility that has been contacted should notify Cheri Hummel, CHA vice president, emergency management and facilities.

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What is the difference between public and members-only?

If content is available on another organization's website *without logging in*, it is OK for CHA's article to be public. Examples include published studies, press releases and public resources.

If the content includes sensitive material, or material obtained due to membership in another organization, it should be members-only. Examples include some law enforcement bulletins, CHA comment letters and CHA summaries.