



# 2026 Healthcare trends and recommendations for board members and leaders

In an uncertain and constantly changing healthcare environment, board members and leaders must maintain a focus on their organization's mission. As you navigate a path forward, we encourage you to consider the following 10 healthcare trends and recommendations from The Governance Institute's [recent article](#):

## 1. Intensifying financial pressures. *Boards should:*

- Sharpen financial literacy, request transparent financial data and reporting from management and set clear expectations for disciplined cost management, workplace safety, workforce planning and new revenue strategies.
- Review operating and capital budgets, financial plans and the organization's debt capacity, and update as circumstances change to ensure alignment with organizational needs.

## 2. Workforce redesign and physician burnout. *Boards should:*

- Ask management to analyze workforce age to anticipate retirements, skills inventory, volume seasonality (and the impact on workforce needs), and volume trends and site of care delivery (e.g., outpatient, inpatient and emergency room).
- Ensure leadership prioritizes workforce well-being, flexible staffing models, physician alignment strategies and investments in culture to sustain clinical capacity. Monitor evolving robotic technologies that may help offset labor costs.

## 3. Capital constraints and infrastructure needs. *Boards should:*

- Align capital allocation with strategic priorities, balance debt capacity and explore creative financing or partnerships. Develop a robust strategic plan to guide investment decisions and set priorities for capital allocation.

## 4. Digital transformation and AI integration. *Boards should:*

- Oversee digital strategy and cost/funding, ensure ethical and safe AI use, invest in cybersecurity, and assess the return on investment for digital health tools. Ask critical questions, such as: Are the AI algorithms working as expected? Do our doctors and nurses trust and use them?

## 5. Consolidation and partnerships. *Boards should:*

- Actively evaluate partnership opportunities, merger and acquisition rewards and risks, and alignment with mission, while ensuring due diligence and post-merger integration oversight. If you are considering a merger/partnership, ask a key strategic question: Is your organization positioned to be an integrator (acquirer) or an integratee (acquired)?

## 6. Mental and behavioral health. *Boards should:*

- Stay engaged with management regarding integration of mental and behavioral health services into community resources and new care models.
- Ensure the board is educated on the specific needs of different patient groups — youth, adolescent, adult and senior — and implications for outpatient, inpatient and long-term capacity and access.
- Consider contracting/partnering with specialized behavioral health providers and ensure the organization pursues governmental funding that supports these services.

## 7. Continued rise of value-based and risk-bearing care/payment models. *Boards should:*

- Monitor risk exposure, build expertise in population health and risk-based care management, and support infrastructure for data analytics and care coordination.
- Work with your medical staff to ensure model buy-in, clearly align economic incentives and monitor adoption of care management tools.

## 8. Technology-enabled care beyond the hospital. *Boards should:*

- Oversee investment in care-at-home models, partnerships with vendors and new risk/reimbursement models supporting virtual and distributed care. Explore partnerships as a way to access capital, knowledge and patient care models. Stay current on management's efforts to keep their IT investments up to speed with access, communication and care model use requirements.

## 9. Consumerism and patient expectations. *Boards should:*

- Hold management accountable for patient experience and quality metrics, consumer-focused innovation and competitive positioning against disruptors. Ensure the organization is truly user-friendly and has a robust digital access platform.
- Ensure leadership has strategies in place to proactively address health misinformation, including clear patient communication, trusted clinical voices and digital education that reinforces evidence-based care.

## 10. Health disparities and community responsibility. *Boards should:*

- Work with management to set measurable goals, partner with community resources, link progress to executive performance, and monitor community-impact reporting and documentation of tax-exempt justification. If your organization has risk-based contracts, tie these into community social determinants of health resources.

Information for this article was obtained from:

- [Healthcare Forecast 2026: 10 Trends for Board Members, Senior Leadership, and Physician Leaders](#), By Steven T. Valentine, president, Valentine Health Advisers, and Guy M. Masters, president, Masters Healthcare Consulting, The Governance Institute, January 2026

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