

The Boston Globe

LETTERS

Two Steward hospitals and their communities await their sad fate

August 29, 2024



Maddie Lawson of Ayer took part in a "Hands around Nashoba" event on Aug. 26 as part of a community fight to keep the Nashoba Valley Medical Center open. Josh Reynolds for The Boston Globe

Loss of Nashoba Valley Medical Center would be a crushing blow to the area it serves

Though details are scant, the state is exploring solutions such as eminent domain and additional MassHealth funding to bolster the Steward Health Care hospitals that are being sold ("Cost to rescue Steward hospitals: \$700m," Page A1, Aug. 24).

Yet two hospitals in the network — Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer and Carney Hospital in Dorchester — have been forsaken and are slated to close by Aug. 31. State officials have stated publicly that they lack the tools to intervene despite using such tools as eminent domain and increased funding to try to keep six other Steward hospitals open.

As for Nashoba Valley, the area has suffered from chronic underinvestment in both health care services and basic infrastructure such as transportation, which is an important social determinant of health. The community is already bracing for dire impacts on health, public safety, and municipal finances in a rural region that is stretched thin, with few options for a largely working-class and aging population.

Once the Ayer hospital closes, it will be difficult to reopen it or to repurpose the building for other types of health care uses as the physical plant further deteriorates and workers leave the region for jobs elsewhere.

The time is now for the state to engage the Nashoba Valley community in exploring options and identifying funding to protect health in the region. Investments in primary care and in nonmedical factors that influence health are likely to have the greatest return on investment.

All communities are worthy of the state's attention and investments to survive, rebound, and thrive after the crisis brought on by Steward Health Care's collapse.

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