



## **Response to Questions and Concerns Regarding a Proposed New Level I Trauma Center**

Cleveland Clinic is nationally and internationally recognized for the high quality of care we provide and our unwavering commitment to patients. Every decision we make is grounded in our guiding principle: patients first. Expanding access to world-class trauma care reflects our mission, our responsibility to the community, and our continued commitment to improving outcomes for patients across Northeast Ohio. Suggestions that Cleveland Clinic would pursue any course of action that could jeopardize patient lives are unfounded, misleading, and dishonest. Further, the need for additional trauma resources in our region is not a conclusion reached by Cleveland Clinic alone—it was recently recognized by the Mandel Foundation via its \$30 million investment to support emergency and trauma care on our main campus.

Consistently ranked as one of the world's best hospitals, patients from across the region, the nation, and the world seek our expertise for their most complex, critical medical, procedural and surgical needs. However, there is a gap in the care we provide. Each year, hundreds of severely injured patients must be transferred out of our system – not because we don't have the expertise to treat them, but because the State of Ohio requires a specific trauma designation. Transferring patients adds precious time when patients can least afford delays. Additionally, each time a patient transitions from one provider to another, it introduces risk to the patient's already critical condition.

Adding a Level 1 Trauma Center will enable us to deliver comprehensive, immediate trauma care on-site, reducing the need for transfers and helping ensure patients receive the right care at the right time. Large academic medical centers such as Cleveland Clinic provide Level I trauma care because patients need the rapid access they can provide to a wide range of specialized services – such as neurosurgery, critical care, orthopedics, advanced imaging, and rehabilitation – available around the clock. Cleveland Clinic already provides integrated, complex care every day, positioning us to meet these urgent needs.

This effort builds on our continued investment in patient care, including the expansion of our main campus emergency department and the opening of our new Neurological Institute Building next year. This facility – one of the most advanced in the world – will provide patients with the best neurological care possible. This is significant, since trauma care often requires immediate and ongoing neurological care because injuries to the brain, spine, or nerves are a critical factor in 30–50% of all trauma cases. Together, these projects will increase capacity, strengthen care for patients with serious injuries, and help relieve pressure on emergency departments across the region.



We care deeply about our patients and the communities we serve, and that commitment guides every decision we make. As a nonprofit academic medical center, Cleveland Clinic serves more Medicaid patients than any health system in Ohio and reinvests in our communities by addressing broader needs like food insecurity and housing instability that shape health outcomes.

Trauma care is a natural extension of our responsibility to serve patients throughout Northeast Ohio and beyond. It's also part of a comprehensive community-focused strategy to create faster, increased access for immediate health needs, especially for the communities surrounding our Main Campus. Together, these components will enhance Cleveland Clinic's ability to be a responsive community resource and better serve those living in the neighborhoods near its facilities. Expanding trauma care strengthens the safety net and helps ensure more patients can receive lifesaving care close to home, when it matters most.

Our intent is simple: To help people. To care for patients. To stand ready when our community needs us most. Establishing a Level I trauma center reflects that commitment – today and for the years ahead.

### **Demonstrated Need**

Cleveland Clinic has been carefully evaluating a Level I trauma center for several years. Our decision to move forward is intended to close an existing gap in our care that hinders us from best serving our patients. Our focus is meeting the tangible needs of patients who come to us for care rather than estimated needs in a business assessment.

Trauma is a leading cause of death for individuals aged 1-46 years. Data from the Northern Ohio Trauma System (NOTS) show a consistent rise in trauma injuries from 2016 through 2023 (the last year we have data for). Cleveland Clinic cares for the sickest patients in the country, however without the Level 1 trauma designation, we cannot apply our significant expertise in caring for critically ill patients to fully care for patients who are severely injured and require the highest level of trauma care.

Each year, over 600 patients who are brought to Cleveland Clinic following traumatic injuries are transferred out of our system because we do not have the required trauma designation needed to treat them, even as they are fighting for their lives. Our lack of Level 1 trauma designation also means that sometimes we can't be there for our caregivers when they need us most. Last year, over 100 of our own caregivers or their family members covered by our health plan had to seek advanced trauma care elsewhere because they could not be cared for at Cleveland Clinic.



The benefits to our patients will be multi-fold. By eliminating the need to externally transfer patients who need advanced trauma care, we reduce potential risks – such as infection and delay of care – inherent in any patient handoff. Reducing external transfers also may reduce the cost of care by eliminating the need for medical transport between facilities and lowering the likelihood of duplicative services being provided by the transferring and receiving hospital. Finally, providing Level 1 trauma care will increase continuity for our patients, many of whom we care for before and after their traumatic injury. Given the medical complexity of many of the patients we treat, having immediate access to their medical record while providing trauma care may be critical to inform their treatment; post-trauma, some patients will require the highly specialized care we are known for. Outcomes for these patients will be better if we can offer continuity of care, treating them from trauma through their follow-up specialty treatment.

### **Local Stakeholder Coordination**

Cleveland Clinic is a founding member of NOTS, which was developed to facilitate health systems working together to improve the care of patients with traumatic injuries. We remain committed to the NOTS fundamental philosophy of getting the “Right Patient, to the Right Place, at the Right Time.” By adding a Level I trauma center, Cleveland Clinic will help strengthen that mission for patients across Cuyahoga County and Northeast Ohio.

As our plans have crystalized, we have discussed them with NOTS and each of its members, in addition to local government officials. This has included listening meetings and answering questions as they have arisen. One important note is that while Cleveland Clinic will work through NOTS to ensure the best outcomes for our communities’ injured patients, discussion of what service lines a hospital should offer – whether with NOTS or directly with other member hospitals – is not appropriate based on antitrust principles.

We will continue to work with local government, community leaders and members, faith leaders, accreditation and certification organizations, and other stakeholders over the next two years to prepare for and establish the center.

### **Workforce Considerations**

We are assessing the staffing needs for this center and plan to recruit trained healthcare providers to the center as well as engage existing caregivers. As is the case with other positions for which we hire, we anticipate that we will attract top talent to the region from across the nation. As an example, we are actively recruiting for our Level 2 center in Canton and have attracted candidates from all over the country and even globally. We do not intend to proactively recruit from other local hospitals to fill our positions.



Additionally, a requirement of Level 1 trauma centers is that they provide education and training for residents and fellows. Already recognized as a top rated residency training program, Cleveland Clinic will develop a graduate medical education program to train residents in trauma and surgical critical care. This will further enhance the pool of trauma-trained physicians in Northeast Ohio.

Finally, Cleveland Clinic already has significant internal expertise in trauma care. We operate a Level I adult trauma center at Cleveland Clinic Akron General and three Level II adult trauma centers at Fairview, Hillcrest and Mercy hospitals. Adding a Level I Trauma Center on Main Campus will extend our world-class care to pediatric and adult trauma patients in Cleveland.

### **Financial Impact & Public Funding**

Not only will Cleveland Clinic make our own investment in the new Level 1 trauma center, we are excited to share that significant philanthropic donations will also play a large role. This includes a grant from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Supporting Foundation to launch Cleveland Clinic's Community Bridge to Care Initiative, a program that will help Cleveland residents get the care they need as quickly and seamlessly as possible and expand access to emergency and trauma care.

### **Timeline**

We are in the early stages of a multi-year process to establish a Level 1 trauma center. We will hold a consultation site visit summer 2026 with the American College of Surgeons to assist us in education and recommendations related to seeking a Level I trauma center designation. After we have been operating on a provisional basis, we will undergo a verification survey, as required by the State of Ohio, that will allow us to begin operations as a Level I trauma center. The survey is done through the American College of Surgeons and provides an objective, external validation of the hospital's capability and commitment to providing the highest quality trauma care, which has been shown to lead to better patient outcomes and lower mortality rates.