Hospital bed definitions that can provide uniform terminology for organizations tracking the availability of beds in the aftermath of a public health emergency or bioterrorist event have been released by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Developed by AHRQ-supported researchers at Denver Health in Colorado, the definitions will allow hospital systems and emergency responders seeking beds to speak the same language. Definitions currently in use vary among systems and even among hospitals.

These standardized definitions were vetted by a working group assembled by Denver Health with members from Federal and State governments, hospitals around the Nation, and the private sector.

* **Licensed Beds:** The maximum number of beds for which a hospital holds a license to operate. Many hospitals do not operate all of the beds for which they are licensed.
* **Physically Available Beds:** Beds that are licensed, physically set up, and available for use. These are beds regularly maintained in the hospital for the use of patients, which furnish accommodations with supporting services (such as food, laundry, and housekeeping). These beds may or may not be staffed but are physically available.
* **Staffed Beds:** Beds that are licensed and physically available for which staff is on hand to attend to the patient who occupies the bed. Staffed beds include those that are occupied and those that are vacant.
* **Unstaffed Beds:** Beds that are licensed and physically available and have no current staff on hand to attend to a patient who would occupy the bed.
* **Occupied Beds:** Beds that are licensed, physically available, staffed, and occupied by a patient.
* **Vacant/Available Beds:** Beds that are vacant and to which patients can be transported immediately. These must include supporting space, equipment, medical material, ancillary and support services, and staff to operate under normal circumstances. These beds are licensed, physically available, and have staff on hand to attend to the patient who occupies the bed.

The relationship between the different types of beds is shown below.