

President's Column: 2023: A Year of ACTION

By Eric Borgerding, WHA President and CEO

As I reflect on another year flown by, 2023 can be summed up in one word: ACTION—some vigorously on the offensive and, unfortunately, some staunchly defensive. Regarding the latter, I've been in the advocacy game for more than 35 years and cannot recall hospitals under attack and scapegoated quite like they've been this past year. The "hero" status earned during the pandemic has long faded. Today, vitriolic anti-hospital interest groups, springing up like weeds, have gone so far as to compare hospitals to "cartels" and "extortionists waiting to prey on the most vulnerable." Nothing is further from the truth. It makes our blood boil, frankly.

This intentionally inflammatory rhetoric has diverted attention from other elements of the health care system [much in need of scrutiny](#) and stoked a change in public sentiment that we could already see coming. Polling conducted in the fall of 2022 told us the public was growing increasingly concerned with health care costs and that too many did not understand that 94% of Wisconsin's hospitals are not-for-profit. While these findings indicated an educational opportunity for WHA, polling also showed that the public was not willing to compromise Wisconsin's high-quality health care. Thus, a key component of WHA's strategy in 2023 (and continuing in 2024) was reminding the public, especially policymakers, of all that hospitals do inside and outside their walls. In other words, simply telling their stories... telling the truth.

To be clear, this battle was brought to us, and WHA has proudly fought for hospitals using all resources and strategies at our disposal. We've told our members' stories through newspaper editorials, social media, billboards, radio and digital advertising. We stood with our members as they met with dozens of lawmakers at hospital-hosted meetings across the state; at WHA-led bipartisan workforce and behavioral health briefings in the State Capitol; and at WHA's Advocacy Day where 1,000 attendees came back to Madison after a three-year pandemic-precipitated hiatus to fight for hospitals. We stood with our members at public hearings testifying in support of several WHA-crafted bills, including increasing funding for graduate medical education, expanding access to psychiatric hospitals, and better utilizing the health care workforce. And our members have mobilized to adamantly push back against misguided hospital transparency mandates being sold as "free market" health care reform. And if that wasn't enough, our members came with us to Washington, D.C. four times in 2023 to stand up for hospitals across Wisconsin.

Hospital voices proved powerful last year, especially as WHA navigated a state with divided government. Despite the headwinds, working hand in hand with our members and valued partners in the Legislature, WHA delivered one of the strongest state budgets in years, boosting Medicaid reimbursement more than \$350 million for hospitals and health systems. And as I write this there's still much in play, including more WHA-driven legislation on workforce, behavioral health and post-acute care.

This was also a very strong year for our educational programming, quality improvement efforts and the incredible WHA Information Center, which celebrated 20 years of flawless high performance.

It's obvious to me, and has been for many years now, that the WHA team is unequivocally the best in the business. They are an extremely talented, committed and highly regarded group. But their foundation and strength ultimately come from our members. We couldn't do this without their active involvement, especially in a year like 2023, and for that, I sincerely say to our more than 140



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members...thank you!

We are honored to be your voice in Madison and Washington, D.C.

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