



# 2023 | Community Benefits Report



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## WISCONSIN HOSPITALS CARE: SUPPORTING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

### A Message from WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding

Wisconsin hospitals and health systems deliver exceptional health care services around the clock, every day of the week. However, their commitment extends beyond the four walls of the hospital. Nonprofit hospitals strive not only to provide outstanding patient care, but also to enhance the well-being of the community they proudly serve. They actively seek opportunities to support and promote overall health and wellness.



This year's report reinforces our member hospitals' dedication to enhancing and enriching our local communities. Their top priority remains providing care to those who need it most and supporting various initiatives unique to their local towns, villages and neighborhoods, such as food banks, career counseling, mental health services, transportation services, housing solutions, adaptive playgrounds for all kids—this list goes on. Even while Wisconsin hospitals are facing difficult financial headwinds, their commitment to the community comes first.

Through various programs, Wisconsin hospitals and health systems provided more than \$2.1 billion in community benefits and charity care in fiscal year 2022. This report showcases hospitals' local support across the state. Wisconsin's hospitals, staff, and volunteers acknowledge their crucial role as a safety net for the community and take pride in it. And we are proud to share their stories.

The stories within this year's report also serve as a reminder of the unwavering dedication of hospitals. They are there for people when nobody else is, even when offering services that aren't financially viable in the free market.

Each day our hospitals provide care to over 1.5 million individuals enrolled in the state Medicaid program, despite receiving roughly 65 cents for every dollar it costs to treat a patient. Consequently, they endure an annual loss of \$1.6 billion. Furthermore, they extend their care to those without insurance, filling a gap that no one else will.

Discover and explore specific initiatives happening in your own area of the state, organized by region. Share these inspiring stories with others. An interactive online version of the report is available on our website, and we'll highlight various stories on our social media. Learn more at [WHA.org](https://www.wisconsinhospitals.org).

Wisconsin's health care providers are committed to service beyond patient care. Thanks to our members who consistently go above and beyond in providing high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care services, and supporting stronger communities throughout our state.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Borgerding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a distinct loop at the end.

Eric Borgerding,  
WHA President/CEO



## Community Benefit Fiscal Year 2022 Financial Summary

### Community Benefits

Charity Care at Cost	\$151,488,812
Medicaid Shortfalls	\$1,344,763,224
Losses on Other Public Programs	\$54,530,569
Subsidized Health Services	\$111,008,380
Nursing Home Losses	\$23,017,512

### Benefit Category

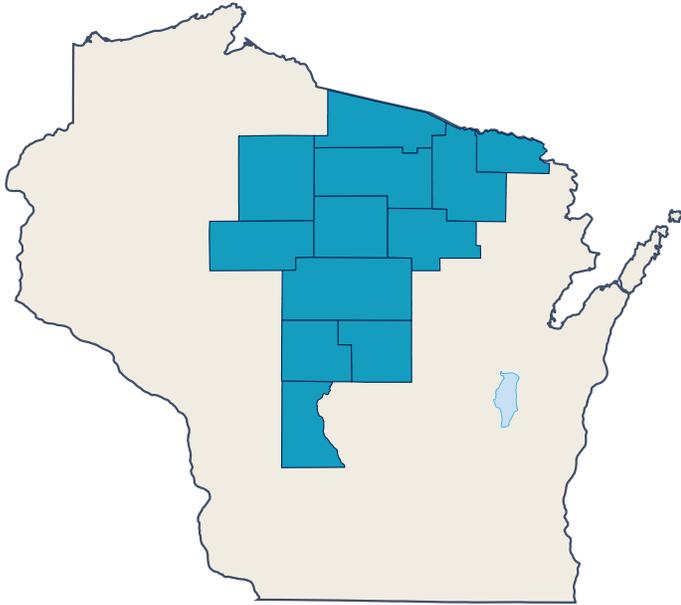
Community Health Improvement Services	
<i>Community Health Education</i>	\$26,088,018
<i>Community-Based Clinical Services</i>	\$8,401,221
<i>Health Care Support Services</i>	\$25,966,569
<i>Social &amp; Environmental Improvement Activities</i>	\$4,619,054
Total Community Health Improvement Services	\$65,074,862
Cash or In-Kind Donations	\$35,815,186
Loss on Health Professions Education/Workforce	\$276,907,406
Loss on Research	\$24,107,568
Community Building Activities	\$9,921,529
Community Benefit Operations	\$10,979,69

**Total Community Benefits\*** **\$2,107,614,739**

\* WHA follows CHA Community Benefit Guidelines, which excludes Medicare shortfalls and bad debt expense from the community benefit calculation. In fiscal year 2022, the statewide estimate for Medicare shortfalls was \$3,270,553,726 and bad debt at cost was \$226,143,579.



# North Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$144,234,443**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Aspirus Offering Free Health Screenings at Lakeland Pantry

Howard Young Medical Center, Woodruff

Feeding those in need has been the mission of the Lakeland Pantry for over 50 years and now free health screenings are offered to individuals and families thanks to a partnership with Howard Young Medical Center, part of Aspirus (HYMC).



*A dedicated space at Lakeland Pantry is used by staff from Aspirus Health to provide free health services.*

Volunteer Aspirus medical personnel or retired nurses are available during pantry hours to provide blood pressure readings, blood sugar (glucose) checks, and to give nutritional advice for the pantry's clients. The Lakeland Pantry offers bi-weekly supplemental food and health screenings on the second Tuesday and Thursday of each month.

"The Lakeland Pantry, along with Aspirus Health, realized the need for another source in our community for our clients to take advantage of basic health screenings," said Lorna Springate, Lakeland Pantry Director. "Howard Young Medical Center and Aspirus Woodruff Clinic have taken this over as a service to the pantry and the pantry provides a private room where screenings can be done."

"We're happy to offer this service for the community," said Meghan Coyle, HYMC Nursing Manager and Lakeland Pantry Volunteer. "We offer free screenings so you can keep an eye on your health on a consistent basis."

Each week the Lakeland Pantry distributes close to 17,000 pounds of food to the area and 95% of food is purchased with money donated by community businesses, individuals, churches and service groups.

The Lakeland Pantry is located at 1707 Hwy 51 North, Arbor Vitae and offers weekly supplemental food to include meat, eggs, produce and dairy. They also have new and gently used clothing for children and adults, books for all ages and items for infants and toddlers. All services are free.

To learn more about the Lakeland Pantry, please visit [lakelandpantry.com](http://lakelandpantry.com).

### Mile Bluff Provides Access to Free, Discounted Health Screenings

Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston

Every year, Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston provides traditional charity care to hundreds of patients, forgiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills. Not only does Mile Bluff offer help in big ways like this, it also assists with the 'small,' every-day things.



*Area residents have access to free and discounted health screenings through Mile Bluff's monthly health fair events.*

Recognizing that the fear of cost can often lead people to put off receiving routine, preventative care, Mile Bluff hosts monthly events to give area residents access to free, discounted, life-saving health screenings. The health fairs are offered in various locations throughout the year, and many Mile Bluff providers suggest the events to their patients as a cost-effective option for diagnosing and monitoring medical conditions.

Those who attend the health fairs can receive free blood pressure checks, blood sugar screenings, risk factor health reports, and hearing tests. Cholesterol testing is also available for a low out-of-pocket price of just \$20.

All of these services help to equip area residents with information that helps them have a positive impact on their wellness, ultimately leading to an overall healthier community.

## *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

### **Aspirus Emerging Leaders Program**

#### **Aspirus Health, Wausau**

The Aspirus Emerging Leaders program is a 13-week leadership development program designed to provide additional learning opportunities for employees who have a desire and the potential to become leaders within the organization.



*Mariah Mork is a graduate of the Aspirus Emerging Leaders program*

While in the program, participants develop and learn about management and leadership skills, and dive deep into the leadership structure, along with the mission and values at Aspirus.

Mariah Mork started out as a triage nurse at Aspirus Waupaca Clinic where she expressed her interest in leadership. She was accepted into the Emerging Leaders program in September 2022 and was offered a position as a nurse supervisor at Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital before she graduated in December. She has since moved up to Clinic Manager at Aspirus Waupaca Clinic.

Through the program she was able to learn and grow as a leader while also networking and learning more about the Aspirus organization.

“While in the program you gain friendships, get to know many leaders within Aspirus and understand how Aspirus implements their missions and values within their leadership structure,” says Mariah. “The people I can reach out to for support are always very helpful and the program offers many resources.”

The program is made up of 35 members each session and is offered to anyone within the Aspirus system.

The Aspirus Emerging Leaders Program begins accepting applications in the spring and fall.

### **School Medical Advisor Program**

#### **Marshfield Medical Center-Weston**

School nurses in Central Wisconsin are receiving professional support through the School Medical Advisor Program, a novel partnership between Marshfield Clinic Health System and Marathon County Special Education (MCSE) to support continuity of care for all students.

Dr. Jeffrey H. Lamont, a long-time health system pediatrician and recognized state and national leader in school health, serves as medical advisor to school districts through MCSE, which provides a variety of programs and services to a consortium of schools in the Marathon County area. MCSE supports the consortium’s growing need for health services as the needs of school-aged children grow in scope and complexity and school nurse capacity is often lacking.

Dr. Lamont provides assistance with policy and procedures for student care, training and support to both licensed and unlicensed school personnel, coordination between providers and schools regarding continuity of care, and more. He works with school personnel and local boards on children’s health issues and collaborates with public health officials on areas of mutual interest.

Recent increases in participation serve as a testament to the value of the School Medical Advisor Program. Since 2019, the number of school nurses participating in monthly educational meetings has increased from 10 to 40. The number of school districts participating in the program has increased from 10 to 22. Initially designed to serve and support a few schools in the Marathon County area, the program has increased in scope and reach.

In collaboration with Dr. Lamont, school nurses formed an organization called Central Wisconsin School Nurses (CWSN). Dr. Lamont and CWSN are currently evaluating the program and plan to create new goals for the 2022-23 school year that will serve a larger audience of school nurses.

## Mile Bluff Builds, Maintains a Strong Workforce

### Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston

One way Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston responded to the unprecedented hiring challenges of today's work environment, was by offering a medical assistant apprenticeship program. To help find candidates for this hard-to-fill position, Mile Bluff offered to cover the cost of tuition and provide on-the-job training. In exchange, apprentices would work at Mile Bluff during their year-long training program, and then stay with the organization for at least another two years after earning their certification.



*One of the many events coordinated by Mile Bluff's Fun Squad is Celebration Week. The delivery of fresh fry pies is always a welcome treat for employees.*

Mile Bluff also focused efforts on recruiting medical providers, and was able to hire nine new practitioners. These additions allowed the organization to continue to meet the growing need for care in its clinic, hospital, emergency, urgent care, surgery and same-day care settings.

Aside from searching for new employees, Mile Bluff also continued its efforts to rebuild and maintain a positive working environment for its current team. Not only did the entire leadership group receive culture-specific training; but the staff was able to partake in morale-boosting initiatives throughout the year. There was a pig roast and bonfire event, free outings at a local concert venue, a bake-off competition, and events coordinated by Mile Bluff's Fun Squad—a committee dedicated to ensuring that there is at least one fun thing planned for employees every month.

Mile Bluff recognizes that investing in its employees will ultimately have a positive impact on the people they serve. This is why, despite the need to focus so much attention on recruitment and retention, Mile Bluff never wavered in carrying out its mission in the community.

## Health Equity

### National LGBTQ+ Speakers Headline Mental Health Summit in Wisconsin Northwoods

**Aspirus Health North WI Division (Howard Young Medical Center, Woodruff; Aspirus Eagle River Hospital, Eagle River; Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital, Rhinelander; Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital, Tomahawk)**

Aspirus Koller Behavioral Health hosted the Frank B. Koller Biennial Mental Health Summit which focused on LGBTQ+ topics on May 19 at Lake of the Torches Convention Center in Lac du Flambeau. The event was free and drew over 65 professionals and community members from across the region.

This year's focus for the summit was LGBTQ+ to discuss current legislations, lived experience, advocacy in the field with a special focus on the resources available to those who live, work, and identify as LGBTQ in Northern Wisconsin.



*Speakers and Organizers of the Aspirus Koller Behavioral Health Mental Health Summit*

Attendees had the opportunity to listen to presentations from local and national speakers. Kellie Maloney (she/her), boxing legend and LGBTQ+ advocate was the keynote speaker for the event. Kellie has an influential career in the spotlight. She was formerly known as boxing promoter Frank Maloney for world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis. Kellie's high-profile transition has seen her become a role model for the LGBT + community and an award-winning advocate. Kellie spoke on the topic of self-empowerment, authenticity and overcoming adversity.

The Mental Health Summit also featured The Trevor Project, Ally Training with speaker Keygan Miller (they/them), Director of Public Training from the Trevor project. Keygan provided the audience with an interactive training called Ally interactive. The Trevor project is the world's largest suicide prevention and mental health organization for LGBTQ young people.

“We were honored to share these inspirational speakers with our community,” said Heidi Pritzl, MSW, LCSW, counselor and clinical therapist, Aspirus Koller Behavioral Health. “This event was well received by our community and helped to remind us of the importance of kindness toward all.”

The Frank B. Koller Mental Health Summit is held every two years by Aspirus Koller Behavioral Health employees. For more information about Aspirus Koller Behavioral Health, please visit [aspirus.org](http://aspirus.org).

## Advancing Health Equity and Social Determinants of Health

### Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua

Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua joined the Northwoods Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Community of Practice. This is a group of regional community members interested in supporting a more just, equitable, diverse and inclusive culture in the Northwoods of Wisconsin. This group meets monthly to offer resources and support to those interested in learning more about equity, inclusive communities and access, and how to engage in actively promoting these values. By participating in this community of practice, Marshfield Clinic is engaging in community efforts related to advancing health equity and social determinants of health.

## Mile Bluff Offers Payment Options with MDsave, CareCredit

### Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston

The fear of medical bills can be enough to stop individuals from seeking the care they need—especially if they have little or no health insurance. To provide patients with additional payment options, and some peace of mind, Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston has chosen to partner with MDsave and CareCredit.

With MDsave, patients can go online, and with the click of a button, pre-purchase select services at upfront, bundled, discounted rates. It is a great option for those who are uninsured or underinsured, those who have high deductibles or have been denied authorization, and those who are simply

looking for more affordable pricing to cover out-of-pocket medical expenses. At Mile Bluff, MDsave can be used to pay for orthopedics, OB/GYN, pain management care, and more.



*Mile Bluff Medical Center, MDsave and CareCredit work together to offer affordable payment options to patients.*

CareCredit is a credit card that can be used for out-of-pocket health and wellness expenses that are not covered by medical insurance—including purchases made on MDsave. Card approval is based on minimal qualifications, and the card offers special financing options that are not generally available with other credit cards. Not only does offering this card help patients with the immediate issue of medical bills, but it can also help them to build their credit for long-term success.

Mile Bluff, MDsave and CareCredit all work together to break down the barrier of cost that can sometimes get in the way of individuals seeking out the care they need.

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### Aspirus Langlade Continues Support for Local Food Insecurity Programs

#### Aspirus Langlade Hospital, Antigo

There's been a longstanding relationship between Aspirus Langlade Hospital and the Antigo Community Food Pantry as the hospital owns and supports the building that the pantry utilizes for their distribution center.

A Weekend Backpack Program (WEB) integrated into the space a few years ago after child hunger data was identified in a previous Community Health Needs Assessment. Since then, the program has made a permanent home in the pantry building.

“This has been a great partnership that addresses hunger with various ways of distribution across all ages of the community,” said Meghan Mattek, Community Health Improvement Lead for Aspirus Health in Antigo.

In order to provide students food over the weekend, backpacks are prepared weekly and sent home through local schools. They contain easy-to-prepare food, nutritional information, recipes, and available community resources for children and families.

After continued growth presented volunteer challenges, WEB participated in a continuous process improvement project led by staff from Aspirus Langlade. Historically, approximately 300 volunteers annually were needed one night a week to pack approximately 250-350 backpacks.



*Another great example of the partnership between Antigo High School and the Antigo Community Food Pantry. The Cabinetry 3 class crafted a shelving structure to help store the food products used for the WEB Backpack Program.*

The improvement project fostered a partnership with a special education class in the Antigo School district. The program is always looking for opportunities to expose their students to various skill sets and partnering with WEB allowed them to work on counting, sorting, and packing the inventory.

“Without this collaboration, WEB would have had to adjust their distribution schedule by reducing the number of weeks by more than one third of the previous schedule,” adds Mattek.

WEB has a number of goals they continue to work toward. Without collaborations and community partnerships, it would not have the support and volunteers needed to continue to serve and improve the health of children and families in the Antigo area.

## Aspirus Expands SANE Programs in Northern Wisconsin

### Aspirus Medford Hospital and Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reports that about 1.2 million Wisconsin adults have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime—that’s about one out of three adult women and almost one out of every five adult men.



*Amy Riegert, Registered Nurse and SANE Coordinator with Aspirus Health*

The experience of sexual assault is deeply devastating for patients and their loved ones. To help begin the healing process, the nurses of the Aspirus Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program provide compassionate care and treatment to patients who have been assaulted.

In 2023, Aspirus Health expanded local access by adding SANE programs at Aspirus Medford Hospital and Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital.

“We have a team of nurses with specialized training to perform medical and forensic examination for adolescents and adults who have been sexually assaulted or strangled,” says Registered Nurse and SANE Coordinator with Aspirus Health Amy Riegert.

SANE exams can be done up to 120 hours, or five days, after an assault. When patients report to an Aspirus ED where services are available, they are brought to a dedicated safe and private environment where the exam will take place.

“Our exams encompass trauma-informed care as these patients have been through traumatic events and we give them their autonomy back during this exam and allow them the opportunity to make choices for themselves,” says Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer for the Aspirus Northwest WI Division Jessica Faude, RN-BC.

In total staff at seven Aspirus facilities have completed the necessary training to offer SANE in their Emergency Departments.

“We are proud to add this important program to our facilities which excel in providing highly specialized clinical care in concert with the compassion needed under difficult circumstances,” said Aspirus North WI Division President Teri Theiler.

## Raise Your Voice Fosters Student Mental Health Advocates

### Aspirus Merrill Hospital, Merrill

In the Spring of 2020, students at Merrill High School launched the Raise Your Voice (RYV) club by recruiting leaders with an interest in mental health advocacy.

After being temporarily sidelined by the COVID-19 pandemic, students reenergized the program after seeing many students struggling with mental health issues and isolation in the wake of community-wide COVID-19 mitigation measures. What started as a group of eight quickly grew to more than 100 members.



Members of the Raise Your Voice Chapter at Merrill High School

“Raise Your Voice is a welcoming, supportive, and safe environment for students interested in discussing and advocating for those living with mental illness in their school community,” said Jane Bentz, Community Health Improvement Lead for Aspirus Health in Merrill. “This student-led club is open to all students, whether they live with mental illness, know someone or have a general interest in advocating for mental health.”

Since its launch, RYV members have received training on how to support a peer who is struggling with resources like Question, Persuade, Refer and additional training on adolescent mental health provided by local professionals.

Community events organized by RYV have raised funds to support the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Northwoods and Tyler’s Playground which is located on the Riverbend Trail in Merrill and was built in Memory of Tyler Holbach who died by suicide.

Merrill’s RYV chapter also provided encouragement to other school districts in the area to form their own chapters.

Thanks to the support of Aspirus and NAMI Northwoods, Wausau West and Wausau East High Schools, DC Everest High School and the School District of Marathon have since added RYV to their list of approved school activities for students. The Antigo School District is the latest to come aboard for the 2023-24 school year.

## Aspirus Pediatrics Team Encourages Reading with Little Ones

### Aspirus Plover Hospital & Clinic, Plover

The pediatrics team at Aspirus Plover Hospital & Clinic is passionate about the benefits of reading to infants and children.

“The families we care for trust us to guide them on all aspects of their child’s health and development,” said Jolyne Check-Ostrowski APNP, a pediatric nurse practitioner at Aspirus Plover Clinic. “That’s why we incorporate Reach Out and Read into our clinical practice.”

Reach Out and Read is a nationwide network of clinicians that encourages reading to children to nurture literacy and parent/child bonding. Check-Ostrowski was instrumental in bringing the program to Aspirus Plover Hospital & Clinic 10 years ago, using grants and local community funding. Aspirus Health Foundation now provides additional financial support.

“We provide books to children at every well visit, starting at age four months through five years,” said Check-Ostrowski. “At every visit, we emphasize the importance of reading to their little ones, even before they can communicate.”

Studies demonstrate that reading to children early on not only strengthens their cognitive development, communication skills, and later academic success, but it also establishes a lifelong love of reading.



Jolyne Check-Ostrowski APNP, a pediatric nurse practitioner at Aspirus Plover Hospital and Clinic

“We show parents how to hold books to best engage their child, and how to interact with the story and pictures to help their child follow along,” said Check-Ostrowski. “We also share advice on how to talk about stories with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.”

Studies show that the Reach Out and Read model has a significant effect on parental behavior and attitudes toward reading aloud and that participating families read more frequently to their children. Interestingly, studies also show

that families involved with the Reach Out and Read program demonstrate higher attendance rates for well child visits.

“It’s very rewarding to see parents leave inspired to cuddle up with their little one and a book,” said Check-Ostrowski.

## Striving to Meet Local Mental Health and AODA Needs

### Aspirus Riverview Hospital, Wisconsin Rapids

In the U.S., one in five adults and one in six children experience mental illness each year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Aspirus Health is striving to educate everyone about how to receive treatment for mental health conditions.



Staff members from the Aspirus Riverview Behavioral Health Clinic

Each year, local health needs assessments show mental health and alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) to be the greatest need in our area. In response, Aspirus partnered with the Legacy Foundation of Central Wisconsin to help address this need by establishing the Aspirus Riverview Behavioral Health Clinic in Wisconsin Rapids.

Since its opening in 2018, the clinic has grown to include multiple providers and community partners. Aspirus Riverview Behavioral Health Clinic now serves patients of all ages at its clinic in Wisconsin Rapids, an area high school, and the Wood County jail.

The clinic’s team includes psychiatrists, physician assistants, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, child therapists, adult therapists, and support staff. In addition, two adult therapists work at the Wood County jail, assisting with inmates’ mental health needs. We continue to see the benefits of this service, as the number of suicidal inmates has been decreasing.

In 2022, one of the psychiatrists launched a Suboxone program for opioid addictions within the Wisconsin Rapids

clinic. Suboxone is used to stabilize someone who is in opioid withdrawal and for maintenance treatment to promote recovery from opioid use.

“The first step toward change is recognizing something could be better,” said Nicki Williams, Aspirus system director of behavioral health. “It is wonderful to see the community understanding the needs and raising their concerns. We are grateful to be part of the positive changes our community is seeking.”

## Aspirus Helps Feed Neighbors in Need in Stevens Point

### Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital, Stevens Point

More of our neighbors face hunger than many of us realize. In Wisconsin, living with hunger is the reality for 1 in 14 people and 1 in 9 children, according to Feeding America.

Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital is helping the hungry in its community by donating its excess untouched food to the local Salvation Army. These donations often include sandwiches, pizza, and veggie trays. Three times a week, the Salvation Army picks up the food and redistributes it to those in need. The hospital’s annual donation of food and staff time equates to more than \$50,000.



Food and Nutrition Services staff at Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital deliver excess food to the local Salvation Army.

“By packaging and donating untouched food that would otherwise be thrown away, we are able to share approximately 270 pounds of food each month with our community members who struggle with hunger,” said Catherine Noth, director of nutrition and food services at Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital.

Additionally, Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital helps feed many area homebound individuals. The hospital's nutritional services team prepares the meals that are delivered by volunteers through the Meals on Wheels Program of Stevens Point. This team also prepares the specialized modified meals that are served by the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Portage County.

The hospital's nutritional services department dedicates 2.5 FTE of staff time daily to produce these meals.

"Our team is passionate about the healing power of healthy, great-tasting food," said Noth. We are gratified to know that our time and talents are being shared with those in need throughout our community."

## Rewarding Safe Bikers: Helmet Initiative Returns

### Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Wausau

Warm weather brings the return of many favorite outdoor activities such as riding bikes, scooters, roller skates, and skateboards. These activities are a great way to have fun and stay active. However, these activities also involve a risk of injury.

That's why Aspirus Health and Safe Kids Marathon County partners are joining forces on the "Helmet Hero" program to encourage kids to, "be your own hero by wearing a helmet."



Amanda Tabin, Safe Kids and Injury Prevention Coordinator at Aspirus Wausau Hospital

"Children ages five through 14 are seen in the emergency room for bike-related injuries more than any other sport, yet less than half wear helmets," says Amanda Tabin, Safe Kids and Injury Prevention Coordinator at Aspirus Wausau Hospital. "Nearly half of children hospitalized for bike-related injuries are diagnosed with a traumatic

brain injury. Wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of severe brain injuries by up to 85%."

Safe Kids Marathon County partners, such as local heroes from the Wausau and Everest Metro Police Departments, will keep an eye out for kids wearing a helmet when participating in wheeled sports such as riding a bike or scooter. Kids spotted wearing helmets will be rewarded with a "Helmet Hero" ice cream coupon.

"We love to see citizens and visitors outside using their bicycles to enjoy the outdoors, but we also know that crashes happen with riders of all skills and abilities," says Lieutenant Nathan Cihlar with Wausau Police Department. "The Helmet Hero Program is a good reminder and incentive for kids to wear a helmet whenever venturing out for a ride."

If cost is a barrier, families are encouraged to follow Safe Kids Marathon County on Facebook. "We distribute free bike helmets at a few pop-up locations and post details in advance of each event." Safe Kids is able to distribute free bike helmets.

## Increasing Capacity in Communities to Get Things Done

### Marshfield Clinic Health System, Marshfield

Marshfield Clinic's Center for Community Health Advancement (CCHA) manages two AmeriCorps programs that place nearly 100 individuals throughout Wisconsin to work on community health priorities. AmeriCorps is a voluntary civil program supported by the U.S. federal government that engages adults in public service work with a goal of "helping others and meeting critical needs in the community."

It has been described as a domestic Peace Corps. CCHA has over 20 years of experience in managing AmeriCorps programs. AmeriCorps Recovery Corps and AmeriCorps Community Corps recruit individuals called members to serve at law enforcement agencies, county jails, community-based organizations, public health departments, social service departments, health care organizations, nonprofits and local coalitions. Members provide additional capacity to support programs and initiatives that improve community health. AmeriCorps Recovery Corps members undergo Recovery Coach training using the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) model of recovery coaching. They do not offer clinical care, but instead focus on non-clinical care and support like help with employment, transportation, and other social needs that help support the recovery journey. By reducing substance use, Recovery Corps members are helping to build healthier communities. AmeriCorps Community Corps members serve organizations that are addressing local community health priorities such as nutrition and physical activity, mental health, prevention of alcohol and substance misuse, healthy growth and development, and social emotional health.

CCHA placed 16 Recovery Corps and 48 Community Corps members throughout Wisconsin in 2022. Recovery Corps members reached over 3,600 people through advocacy and recovery coaching services. Of those who used recovery coach

services, 98% reported the services helped them maintain sobriety and 57% of clients made progress toward at least one goal in their wellness plan. Community Corps members served 33 organizations in 54 counties and carried out a wide variety of activities including health education, vaccine clinic support, food pantry operations and many others.

## Place of Last Drink Program Brings Change

### Marshfield Medical Center-Marshfield

Place of Last Drink (POLD) is a database that identifies patterns of overserving through data collected during Operating While Intoxicated (OWI) stops. Through the Marshfield Area Coalition for Youth (MACY) and in conjunction with the Sober Truth on Underage Drinking (STOP) grant administered through Marshfield Clinic Health System, data has been collected for almost three years.

The strong partnership with the Marshfield Police Department has made this program a success. Every six months data is analyzed, and reports are made to identify Class B alcohol licenses (mostly bars and restaurants) who have been identified as a place of last drink during an OWI stop. When a licensee has been identified, follow up is done based upon the number of times they were named in the POLD data. These licensees receive a letter, POLD report for their specific establishment, and educational handouts as needed. If additional follow up is needed for licensees that were named four or more times in a six-month period, an officer from the Marshfield Police Department contacts and sets up a meeting with the owner in person.

In 2022, the program expanded to a county-wide effort. This expansion has allowed a broader impact to address overserving and excessive alcohol intoxication. Wood County efforts have been recognized at a state level. Marshfield Clinic staff continue to lead and coordinate efforts by sharing local resources with numerous partners throughout the state and presenting at various conferences to share with the others the successes they have been seeing through this county-wide collaborative.

## Program Brings Resources to Price County

### Marshfield Medical Center-Park Falls

Marshfield Medical Center-Park Falls collaborated with the Friends of Park Falls Public Library to offer Mindfulness Kits for tweens and teens. This new program in Price County helps to make mental health resources available for youth and teens. These kits provide a starting point to have a conversation about mental health, to improve social and emotional development, and decrease suicide for youth in crisis.

“Being a teenager has always been rough,” said Youth Services Librarian Cindy Koller. “Our tweens and teens are under immense emotional pressure in this age of social media, cancel culture, and the 24-hour cycle of news. While we have access to more information than at any time in history, we do not always have access to health care and the resources that are needed to help navigate and name the emotions that go with maturing into a young adult. I hope these kits can be a starting point, a conversation starter, or even a lifesaver for a teen or family in crisis.”

The kits contain resources related to healthy relationships, bullying, self-esteem, anxiety, grief, coming out, and finding life direction.

## Addressing Community Needs in Unique Ways

### Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston

Mile Bluff Medical Center exists for the community. The organization prides itself on progress that benefits the people it serves. Significant advancements were made this past year to bring new technology, services and experiences to the members of the community.



*Mile Bluff Medical Center provides financial and volunteer support for the community sharing supper.*

Aside from having a positive impact on the community through its medical mission, Mile Bluff has given back to the community through donations of money, supplies and time.

In the most recent community health needs assessment, access to affordable healthy foods, transportation and mental health services were identified as opportunities for improvement, along with jobs and a strong economy. While these things, in and of themselves, are not services provided

by Mile Bluff, the organization recognized its ability to positively impact the community in these areas.

In response to these needs, Mile Bluff made donations to local food pantries, supported the community sharing supper, gave away free beef, created new jobs and purchased a new van to expand its transportation program. Mile Bluff also maintains partnerships with area counseling services and provides medication-assisted therapy for addiction issues.

This is just a glimpse into the positive effect Mile Bluff had on the community in the past year, which is what led the organization to be nominated for the local chamber's Community Impact Award.

## **Suicide Prevention Training Provides Community Resources**

### **Marshfield Medical Center – River Region at Stevens Point**

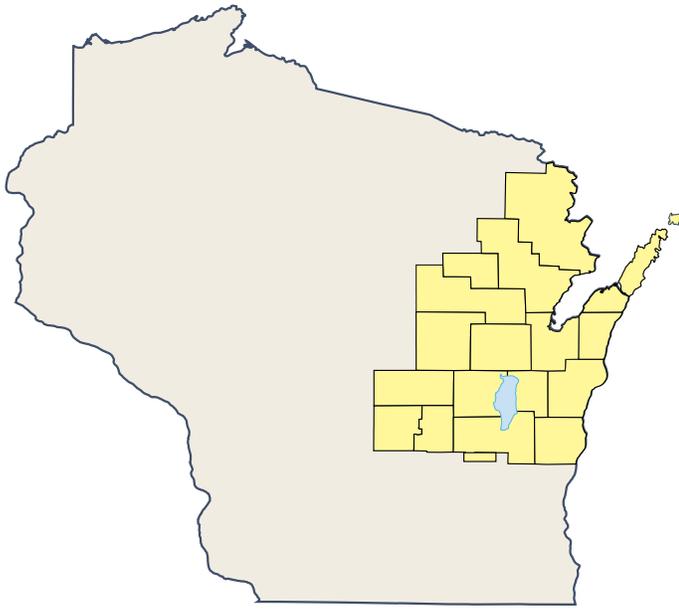
Marshfield Medical Center-Stevens Point provided funding to support Question Persuade and Refer (QPR) training for suicide prevention. The stressors of the recent pandemic have placed additional worries on Wisconsin residents and have worsened risk factors such as mental health concerns and drug use. Suicide is an important public health concern for the state, particularly in communities where there are not culturally relevant training materials available.

To solve this public health problem from a lens of equity and inclusion, all Wisconsin residents need access to training and tools so they can respond if someone they know, or a loved one is in trouble. To address these needs, Marshfield Clinic Health System Center for Community Health Advancement sponsored a Question Persuade Refer (QPR) training in which 10 members of the Spanish Speaking and Hmong communities became certified instructors of QPR where they learned how to teach First Aid for suicide prevention.

To prepare for the training, input from both communities was gathered and training materials were enhanced to better represent mental health needs and related practices.

Jennifer Smith, QPR trainer and QPR project lead said, "We hope to provide relevant learning to the trainers to take back to their communities and teach others how to help support anyone who might be struggling with a difficult life circumstance or their mental/emotional health. When we know what to look for and how to provide support, we can truly make a difference in lives of our friends, neighbors and community members."

# Packerland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$361,003,321**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Everyone Needs a Little Help Now and Then

#### Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay

Adam had been managing a chronic condition for many years. His symptoms had remained fairly controlled until recently when they began to worsen. Rather than seeing a doctor at the first sign of trouble, Adam wanted to try to take care of his symptoms on his own. He was only working part-time, didn't have health insurance, and couldn't afford to pay a medical bill.

Eventually, Adam's symptoms worsened and he knew he needed medical care fast. Adam went to the Emergency Department at Aurora BayCare Medical Center and was admitted for an inpatient stay.

Adam reached out to the hospital's financial advocate, who met with him in his room to complete a financial assessment.

"Adam was really worried about how he was going to pay the bills for the care he needed," the Financial Advocate said. "So I immediately walked him through a financial assessment to see what programs were available to help."

Following the financial assessment, the advocate was able to approve Adam for a 100% discount on his medical bills through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance

Program. The Advocate shared: "Adam was so grateful we were able to approve him for financial assistance." He continued, "Helping people in this way is what makes my job so special."

## Accidents Happen

### Aurora Medical Center - Bay Area, Marinette

Anya was driving home one evening when the unexpected happened and she found herself seeking emergency care at Aurora Medical Center - Bay Area after experiencing a traffic accident. Her injuries were severe, and she required an inpatient stay.

Anya felt panicked when she learned about her need for additional care. Anya wasn't working and her husband had recently lost his job as well. They had no insurance and were already struggling to make ends meet.

When the hospital's Financial Advocate learned of Anya's situation, he immediately reached out to help. He completed a financial assessment and was able to help Anya get approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program for the care she already received.

But that's not all – the Financial Advocate also helped Anya purchase coverage through The Marketplace so she would have insurance to cover any follow-up care she may need.

Anya felt a sense of relief after the Financial Advocate approved her for financial assistance.

When asked about how he felt about sharing the news of Anya's approval with her, the Advocate said, "The sigh of relief from her voice and the utmost gratitude she displayed towards me was quite warming. It was nice to see a patient go from being afraid to being able to rest and heal."

## Delaying Care is Not an Option

### Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County, Two Rivers

Caroline had been struggling with her diabetes for many years. Because she was uninsured, it had been many years since she had seen her doctor.

Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to dangerous symptoms such as extreme fatigue, blurred vision and tingling in the limbs, among others. When Caroline began experiencing some of those symptoms, she realized she couldn't delay seeking medical care any longer.

A provider evaluated Caroline at Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County. The provider determined that Caroline

needed to be admitted for an inpatient stay until her symptoms and blood sugars were under control.

Aware that Caroline was uninsured, with Caroline's permission, the physician asked the hospital's financial advocate to meet with her. During their meeting, the advocate completed a financial assessment and was able to help Caroline gain approval for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

When learning of her approval, Caroline hugged the Advocate and thanked her over and over. Caroline was finally able to relax, worry less about the hospital bill and focus more on getting her diabetes under control.

## A Little Extra Help When Business Slows

### Aurora Medical Center – Oshkosh

Jordan started his own company shortly after he and his wife married. Everything was going well at first and clients were flowing in from all directions. Jordan's business was doing so well that his wife was able to accept a job that would pay less but allow her to be home more often.

Then the economy changed. The number of clients Jordan was able to contract with began to lessen drastically, and so did his income.

When Jordan found himself seeking care in the Emergency Department at Aurora Medical Center-Oshkosh, he couldn't help but worry about how he'd pay his medical bill.

After being discharged, Jordan reached out to the hospital's Financial Advocate to explain that he was self-employed and uninsured, and asked to set up a payment plan for his bill.

After hearing his story, the Financial Advocate asked Jordan if he would be willing to complete a financial assessment together. Jordan immediately agreed.

Based on Jordan's family income, he was approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

"I didn't know this program existed," Jordan said. "I never thought I would be in a position where I would need this type of help and I am so thankful you all were there for me."

## Bellin Gives Back to the N.E.W. Community Clinic

### Bellin Health, Green Bay

Bellin Health and the N.E.W. Community Clinic (NEWCC) have partnered for decades to provide healthcare to the medically underinsured or uninsured in Green Bay. The partnership

began in the 1970s and continues to address socioeconomic barriers and ensure healthcare services for patients and communities.



*Bellin Health providers and staff work closely with the N.E.W. Community Clinic to support their work*

One key aspect of the partnership is the presence of physician volunteers from Bellin Health. Bellin and Gundersen Health System Co-Chief Clinical Officer Dr. Cynthia Lasecki has volunteered at NEWCC for over 20 years, utilizing her expertise in Family Medicine to serve patients. Lasecki values giving back to the community and recognizes the important care provided by NEWCC to an underserved population. In 2022, NEWCC served over 4,700 patients in its medical, dental and behavioral health clinics, totaling more than 14,000 patient visits.

Bellin Health's Telehealth team also plays a crucial role in supporting NEWCC. For the past decade, the Telehealth team has provided after-hours phone support to ensure patients receive prompt and helpful assistance. This has amounted to over 130 calls per month, meeting patient needs regardless of the time of day.

Bellin Health also collaborates with other Green Bay hospitals to provide no-cost lab services on a rotating basis. This partnership alleviates the financial burden for NEWCC's patients and ensures care remains affordable and accessible.

Bellin Health supported NEWCC's adoption of the Epic electronic health records system in 2015, assisting with start-up costs and providing expertise. This continuity of care not only benefits NEWCC patients within the Bellin network but also across other health systems that use the platform.

Both Bellin Health and NEWCC are committed to expanding their partnership in the future and making a difference in the lives of more community members who rely on their services.

## School-Based Physical and Occupational Therapists Support Students to Be at Their Best

### Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah

Having healthy kids requires the combined efforts of families, schools, health care providers and community organizations. At Children's Wisconsin, our work extends beyond the walls of our hospitals and clinics. Our community partnerships are crucial to improving community health and well-being. To best support kids who require physical and occupational therapy in order to function optimally in the school environment, 12 Children's Wisconsin therapists provide school-based care at schools in the Freedom, Kaukauna, Kimberly, Little Chute and Shiocton districts. The physical and occupational therapists work with students in both regular and special education settings to support their individualized education plans to ensure they're able to participate to the best of their abilities.

Therapists evaluate the child's ability to move throughout the school and participate in classroom activities, as well as help implement interventions to help the child participate as independently as possible. In collaboration with parents, caregivers, teachers and other educational staff, therapists help students navigate everything from different floor levels, restrooms and the cafeteria to participating in recess and sports. Occupational and physical therapy interventions help the child in both academic and non-academic settings, aiming to ensure the child is able to fulfill their role as a student.

Children's Wisconsin therapists build strong relationships with students, families and educational staff, strengthening the teams supporting kids in schools. A Fox Valley area special education teacher recently shared that the Children's therapist in her school notices students' needs and has tools, tips, and tricks to help improve both the student and teacher experience. Whether it's seating options, hand grips, writing tools, sensory supports, low tech or high tech supports, Children's therapists help students succeed.

School-based occupational and physical therapists are an important part of a student's special education team and have a direct impact on students successfully meeting their short- and long-term goals.

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### Healthcare Academy Partnership Prepares Medical Professionals of Tomorrow

#### Bellin Health, Green Bay

Green Bay-area high school students are exploring future careers while helping address the health care workforce shortage thanks to an innovative partnership between Bellin Health and Bellin College.



*Green Bay-area high school students are exploring future careers while helping address the health care workforce shortage thanks to an innovative partnership between Bellin Health and Bellin College.*

The Healthcare Academy program allows high school students, most of whom begin as sophomores, to earn up to 42 college credits at a reduced cost while receiving classroom and hands-on instruction that could pave the way for their future careers. At the same time, the program allows the Bellin Health region—part of Bellin and Gundersen Health System—to develop promising young students into the healthcare professionals of tomorrow.

“This program is a win for the students, for Bellin College and for Bellin Health,” said Bellin Health Sports Medicine & Orthopedics Outreach Programs Director Phil Schaible. “The Healthcare Academy allows young people to explore medicine generally, or to hone in on a particular area of interest that is relevant to their future career. They can even train as certified nursing assistants (CNAs) as part of the program.”

The program launched in fall 2022 with a cohort of 39 students from three schools. It quickly grew to include more than 200 students from 11 schools for Fall 2023, and has the potential to grow even further, said Chad Dall, Bellin College Director of Outreach and Engagement.

“The intent of the Healthcare Academy is to help high school students find their passion in healthcare while providing a solid foundation of theory coursework and hands-on experiences,” Dall said. “There is a whole spectrum of careers in health care, and with the help of health care professionals, we can provide meaningful mentorships and job shadow opportunities to help solidify students’ interest in this field.”

## Children’s Wisconsin Grow Our Own Medical Assistant Training Program

### Children’s Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah

Since 2019, Children’s Wisconsin has offered a rewarding opportunity for staff to learn new skills and grow professionally. More than 100 Children’s Wisconsin team members have been part of the Grow Our Own Medical Assistant training program – accelerating their professional development and filling critical workforce needs.



Recent Children's Wisconsin Grow Our Own Medical Assistant program graduates

In less than a year, program participants achieve a medical assistant associate degree while they continue working at Children’s Wisconsin. The program prepares participants to be eligible for a national medical assistant certification program. With online coursework and hands-on learning, participants learn how to perform the key clinical and administrative duties medical assistants fulfill. These tasks include taking and recording patient vital signs, assisting with and performing procedures, administering medications, updating patient records, scheduling appointments and much more. Once the program is completed, Children’s Wisconsin offers the participant a role as a medical assistant. Funded by Children’s Wisconsin, federal and state funding and Herzing University, participants complete the program debt free.

To date, most of the participants have worked in Children’s Wisconsin’s Milwaukee area clinics. However, the first Fox

Valley area medical assistant recently graduated and is working at the Children’s Appleton Clinic. For many graduates, becoming a medical assistant is a career pathway to another health care position. A handful of graduates from the Children’s Wisconsin medical assistant training program are now continuing their education to become registered nurses.

## Health Network Provides \$1 million for Center for Health Care Excellence

### Froedtert Holy Family Memorial Hospital, Manitowoc

The Froedtert & MCW health network, Froedtert Holy Family Memorial Hospital and Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity donated \$1 million to Lakeshore Technical College for the development of a new Center for Health Care Excellence. The new center, set to break ground in 2023, will be a 16,000-square-foot addition and remodel to the existing campus in Cleveland, Wis.



Check presentation to Lakeshore Technical College

The expanded facility will help educate the region’s future health care workforce, reduce workforce shortages and create a pipeline of health care professionals. About 1,500 health care and emergency services students and professionals will train there annually, supporting the growing demand for graduates from Lakeshore’s nursing, emergency medical technician, radiology, medical assistant, paramedic, fire medic and other health care and public safety programs.

## Residency Program Increases ThedaCare Emergency Department Nurse Training

### ThedaCare, Neenah

A new program initiated with the support of the ThedaCare Family of Foundations aims to improve recruitment and retention of Emergency Department (ED) nurses at seven ThedaCare hospitals.

“Recruiting and retaining nurses for Emergency Departments is a challenge for every hospital,” said Audrey Rosin, RN,

manager of Emergency Services at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah. “This new Emergency Nurse Residency Program aims to provide the training and experience nurses need to confidently care for the patients coming to the ED.”



*A new program initiated with the support of the ThedaCare Family of Foundations aims to improve recruitment and retention of Emergency Department (ED) nurses at seven ThedaCare hospitals.*

Rosin said there is an opportunity to provide additional training, orientation and onboarding to help nurses be more successful.

The Emergency Nurses Residency Program (ENRP), developed by the national Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), is an 18-week program focused on building decision-making skills, improving clinical judgment, reducing burnout, and assisting in acclimation to the ED. It includes four weeks of classroom instruction interspersed with hands-on simulation during which time the nurses will engage with experienced ED nurses and do on-the-job shadowing.

“When their classroom training is focusing on a specialty area, such as cardiology or neurology, the nurses will spend four hours in the Cath Lab or working on the Neuro unit, for example, as part of job shadowing,” Rosin explained. “After that, they’ll work with clinical preceptors – that is, experienced practitioners who facilitate the application of theory to practice – from week 6 to week 18, after which they will be prepared to manage patients as a new ED nurse.”

Rosin said the journey to implement the program began in early 2022 when ThedaCare leaders began exploring ways to help retain Emergency Department nurses. ThedaCare determined the best approach would be to embrace a new system-wide training program.

The ThedaCare Family of Foundations agreed the program directly aligned with the ThedaCare System goals of hiring and retaining the best talent and increasing patients’ access to expert, local care.

The initial cohort of nurses to be trained will begin studying in early June 2023, with nurses from Appleton, Neenah, Shawano and Waupaca participating.

## *Health Equity*

### **Children’s Wisconsin Working to Integrate Oral Health Care into Primary Care Settings Across the State**

#### **Children’s Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah**

Oral health is essential to overall health and well-being, however, unfortunately, accessing oral health care services can be challenging. Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin, an affiliate of Children’s Wisconsin, has been working over the last several years to address access disparities by integrating oral health care into primary care settings.

Dental disease is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases and one of the top reasons kids miss school. Untreated cavities impact the ability to eat, speak, sleep, socialize and learn, often resulting in costly and preventable emergency room visits. Significant barriers to accessing care exist, especially for kids living in underserved areas and those with special needs. Nationally, Wisconsin ranks near the bottom in access to dental care for kids covered by Medicaid. Each year, more than 80,000 Wisconsin kids under age five who are covered by Medicaid visit a physician, but don’t visit a dentist.

Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin is leading the effort to pioneer a Medical Dental Integration (MDI) care delivery model where dental hygienists are integrated into primary care appointments to provide early dental prevention and intervention services. In addition to the patient receiving their regular medical exam, the dental hygienist can provide screening, education, any appropriate in-office prevention and ensure the patient is connected to a dental home. Integrating a dental hygienist into the medical team increases the number of patients who receive oral health care, improves patient outcomes and reduces the cost of care. Eleven health care systems and health care centers are involved in Wisconsin’s MDI effort, including in the Fox Valley region. Through the MDI model, more than 17,000 patients have received oral health services. Dental hygienists shared that the opportunity to provide early intervention, education and address barriers to care have been most beneficial for families.

## Collaborating to Meet Growing Elderly Needs

### SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital, Waupun

SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital staff has been focusing on effectively serving the increasing number of aging adults in a variety of ways sitting at the planning table with City of Waupun leaders.



*Artist rendering of the new Waupun Community/Senior Center scheduled to open in the fall of 2024.*

This extensive planning has led to coordinating aging centric programs with the City of Waupun, supporting the Waupun Coalition on Aging as a key partner, representing health care on the DHS Senior Isolation and Loneliness Coalition, and supporting the planning of a new senior center.

The overall process began with Waupun Memorial Hospital's assistance to secure a \$15,000 Wisconsin Office of Rural Health Aging In Place grant—which assists organizations in improving support of older adults and their caregivers by implementing care resources.

The grant has helped in the development of an overall plan supporting the goal of increasing the number of older adults who are able to remain independent in a residence of their choosing while also supporting caregivers who are essential for this population to age in place.

In partnership with Waupun Memorial Hospital, the City of Waupun was also awarded a two-year \$150,000 grant from the UW School of Nursing, which supports the implementation from the planning grant work focused on goals to improve the senior center, develop strong wrap around services/programming for seniors, the creation of a housing plan addressing affordable and accessible housing for seniors, and the creation of a plan to improve transportation resources.

Today, work continues in earnest, thanks to a recent \$4.9 million Neighborhood Investment Fund Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Administration to construct a new, 22,000-square-foot senior center. The facility is slated to open in 2024 and will provide space for increased activity and wrap around service to Waupun's aging population.

## ThedaCare Community Health Action Teams Address Local Health Concerns

### ThedaCare, Neenah

As part of its commitment to improve the health and well-being of the communities served, ThedaCare regularly engages a broad array of community leaders to identify and address local health concerns.

“We recognize the importance of having input from individuals experiencing the health issues their communities are facing, so we organized local Community Health Action Teams (CHAT teams) in each of these markets,” said Paula Morgen, Director of ThedaCare Community Health Improvement (CHI). “These teams are made up of leaders from all sectors of the community, including local government, public health, business, education, health care, philanthropy, non-profit and faith groups. By meeting regularly with people who know their community best, we are able to better understand health issues as well as bring together people who feel ownership in the community to work together on solutions.”

The primary way CHAT teams help the community learn about the effects of a health issue is through an event known as a ‘plunge,’ which is a daylong immersion into the community to learn firsthand about the issue being studied.

Through feedback and discussion, it was determined that the next plunge would focus on youth mental health and social media.



*The first aligned CHAT topic focused on youth mental health and social media.*

Mental health, particularly coming out of the pandemic, was the number one concern across all markets in our recent Community Health Needs Assessments. In addition, U.S. Surgeon General issued a warning about the effects social media is having on the mental health of teens and pre-teens.

Recognizing they are not experts about how youth use social media, ThedaCare's CHI team gathered input from area youth to plan this fall's plunges. On Tuesday, June 20, ThedaCare brought together 25 youth, from middle school ages through young adults in their early 20s, to talk about the impact of social media on mental health and how they would organize a plunge day on this topic.

Morgen noted it was clear the youth were aware of the negatives of social media but seemed to accept those risks as part of the cost of staying connected. She noted the younger youth were more concerned about bullying and fear of missing out, whereas the young adults seemed more focused on social media's long-term impact on younger kids. The group also commented on ways parenting can have positive and negative effects on kids' social media behavior.

## *Hospital-supported Initiatives*

### **Expanding Access through Partnerships**

#### **Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay**

Access, a signature community benefit focus for all Aurora Health Care hospital community health implementation strategies across our Wisconsin footprint. One of the ways we expand access is through building long-term, sustainable, impactful collaborations with community-focused partners.

The N.E.W. Community Clinic is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) whose mission is to provide access to quality, comprehensive, and compassionate healthcare for low-income and uninsured individuals and families in the Green Bay area. The clinic, which now provides care through multiple clinic sites, celebrated its 52nd anniversary in July 2023.

Aurora BayCare Medical Center is a long-time supporter of the N.E.W. Clinic, underwriting Dr. Yolo Diaz's position as a clinic provider since 2001. Dr. Diaz has grown into a trusted member of the Green Bay community, especially amongst Hispanic community members. Through her work as a bilingual provider, she breaks down language and cultural barriers for the patients she serves, communicating directly with patients about their care in their preferred language. She also works closely with other community-focused organizations including local school districts, the WIC program, Family Services, Birth to Three, and Casa Alba Melanie to coordinate medical, behavioral and social health for her patients.

During 2022, Dr. Diaz completed 1,004 patient visits at N.E.W. Community Clinic. This total included visits for 372 new clinic patients.

## **Food Insecurity and the Farmers Market**

### **Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County, Two Rivers**

Being food secure means having consistent access to enough food to sustain a healthy life. Food security is also linked to a reduced risk for multiple chronic health conditions such as obesity, heart disease and others. According to Aurora Medical Center – Manitowoc County's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment completed in 2020, 13.3 percent of Manitowoc County residents experienced food insecurity, an increase from 8.4 percent in 2018.

The City of Manitowoc Downtown Farmers Market provides access locally grown or sourced produce and products. The Aurora Medical Center – Manitowoc County provided funding that made it possible for market guests to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables utilizing EBT services. This increased access to fresh foods for the those in our community who are food insecure and have FoodShare benefits. 324 EBT transactions took place at the Farmers Market during the 2022 season.

Additional ways the hospital expands access to healthy food within the community include:

- Educating families about the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The program provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.
- Donating food to local food pantries. The food pantries then distribute the food directly to families in need. The hospital donated over \$33k in food throughout 2022.

## **Taking Action with Nutrition Education**

### **Aurora Medical Center - Bay Area, Marinette**

Aurora Medical Center - Bay Area is taking action on the community needs assessment to increase options for healthy nutritional offerings. Members of the Aurora Bay Area leadership team volunteered to participate in a "recipe for success" program during a local mobile food pantry event in August 2023.

"When we learned some of the healthy food options at food pantries weren't being consumed because community members didn't know how to prepare the ingredients, we knew we could take action," explains Ed Harding, President at Aurora Bay Area.

The hospital's Food & Nutrition department prepared a recipe that is easy to make. Teammates took the prepared dish to the mobile food pantry and handed out a sample along with the recipe card to more than 400 people.

"The samples and recipes were well received by those attending the event," says Harding.

Aurora Bay Area will be at two more mobile food pantry events in fall 2023.

## Supporting Survivors

### Aurora Medical Center - Sheboygan County, Sheboygan

According to our most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, the rate of rape for Sheboygan County was 30.35 reports per 100,000 persons, higher than Wisconsin's overall rate of 27.91 per 100,000 in 2019. However, when discussing this data, it is important to note that sexual assault and rape are underreported and the definition of sexual assault varies across different agencies; therefore, the number and rate may vary depending on the source.

At the Aurora Medical Center – Sheboygan County, abuse survivors receive care for immediate medical needs in the emergency room. Our specially trained Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNEs) provide compassionate care and help guide survivors to healing as soon as their medical care is complete, respecting the survivor's decisions all along the way.

During 2022, our hospital's Forensic Nurse Examiners:

- Provided 201 people with trauma-informed care in response to sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking.
- Referred all people served to community partners for continued services and support.
- Conducted 19 community education, prevention, and outreach training sessions for 145 community members.

## Children's Wisconsin Supporting Students Across Wisconsin with Healthy Choices and Mindfulness

### Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah

Supporting kids' mental and behavioral health has never been more important. Last year's Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated more than half of Wisconsin students report having anxiety and more than one-third were sad or hopeless every day. In Wisconsin, the percentage of teens who have

consumed alcohol and have misused prescription medications in the last year exceeded the national average.

Talking to kids early about these difficult topics can help them become more informed and prepared to make healthy choices. Children's Wisconsin has created innovative e-learning courses and resources that educators can access, free of charge, to deliver information students need to grow up safe and healthy.

Courses feature a combination of online and classroom activities. Healthy Minds for kindergarten through sixth grade focuses on mental and emotional health providing an engaging look at what makes a healthy mind while introducing healthy skills. Aligning with national and Wisconsin Health Education Standards, Healthy Minds addresses feelings and emotions, empathy and compassion, healthy relationships, common mental health issues and how to get help when needed. After engaging in course content, students demonstrate gains in knowledge, including how to show support for a friend or ways to ask an adult for help.

It's UR Choice helps students in fourth through eighth grades make smart choices when faced with the pressures of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and learn how to stay drug-free. Students learn age-appropriate facts about drugs and their effects on their bodies, how to analyze external and peer influences and how to cope in stressful situations. Students demonstrate gains in knowledge and attitude, including how tobacco affects the body or how substance use affects sports performance.

Children's Wisconsin partners with more than a dozen school districts in the Fox Valley area to promote these opportunities among thousands of students.

## Resiliency Training

### HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, Sheboygan

Mental health and well-being consistently arose as the most prominent community health priority in Sheboygan County during the FY21 Community Health Needs Assessment process. While local providers work to increase and strengthen the workforce available to address these challenges, improving access to prevention and early intervention services is paramount.

For that reason, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital committed to working with community partners to create environments that support positive mental health.

When an opportunity arose to partner with Mental Health America Lakeshore to develop a virtual version of that organization's Resilient Classroom curriculum, HSHS St.

Nicholas welcomed the opportunity to make resiliency training more accessible to local schools. While MHA Lakeshore staff traditionally have presented this training in person to area classrooms, demand has outpaced capacity, leading to the organization to explore the potential for creating a video series for educational establishments. After learning more about the project, the hospital agreed to serve as the sole sponsor with a \$10,000 contribution to cover costs.

In conjunction with this unique partnership, HSHS will work with Mental Health America Lakeshore to make the virtual resiliency curriculum available for classrooms in other communities in Wisconsin and Illinois as well.

## Double Your Bucks

### HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Green Bay

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 938,312 Wisconsin residents were eligible to receive FoodShare in 2022. With the goal of stopping hunger, FoodShare benefits can be used at most stores as well as many farmers markets. HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center partnered with Wello to sponsor the Double Your Bucks program for the ninth consecutive year.

Double Your Bucks increases access to fresh fruits and vegetables for FoodShare users. When families use Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) at local farmers markets, they can purchase more locally grown fruits and vegetables by doubling the first \$10 of their EBT dollars. By purchasing locally grown produce, which is more nutritious than produce that is shipped from a distance, Double Your Bucks helps low-income families be part of their community while helping the environment. Participants can utilize the funds at four markets in the Greater Green Bay Area. This support directly impacts more than 7,000 people annually.

The Brown County Community Health Needs Assessment identified nutrition as a prioritized need for the community, and HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center will continue to support efforts to help address that need.

## SSM Health Greater Fond du Lac Team Provide One-On-One Support to Families Impacted by Gun Violence

### SSH Health St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac

Following a gun violence incident in May 2023 at Maplewood Commons in Fond du Lac, the community has come together to support and organize support for residents in this area of the city. That has included families, police, fire/EMS, schools, behavioral health, grief support, Fondy Cares, Department of Social Services, local churches, Ebony Vision and other community organizations.



*Keziah Love, a psychotherapist with SSM Health Greater Fond du Lac, is among several colleagues who are regularly engaging with community partners to provide outreach services to individuals impacted by a gun violence incident.*

Several activities have already been underway including Connections, Relationships and Activities with Jeff, of Right Choice Improvements and local small churches. SSM Health Greater Fond du Lac has been represented sharing resources thanks to Alex Berg, senior community health specialist; Angie Reyes, community health worker; and Keziah Love, psychotherapist.

In addition, a youth advocacy program has been conducted in the summer with Wednesday activities featuring crafts, games, field trips, etc. Plans call for continuation during the school year.

Lastly, Ebony Vision is extending its lending library from its office at 14 Western Avenue, Suite 203 to the office at Maplewood Commons. Books range from children to adult books, to autobiographies and are inclusive of books created by black authors and include characters and stories from people of color.

## Hospital Supports All Abilities Playground

### SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital

With a belief that every child deserves a place to play, feel exhilarated and experience new environments, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital is financially supporting a new all-inclusive playground at a local Ripon park through a \$7,500 donation.

The Ripon Early Bird and Ripon Noon Kiwanis Clubs, in collaboration with Fond du Lac County, are partnering to raise funds to build an ADA-compliant, all-inclusive playground for children ages five to 12 years. The playground will be built at Riggs Park, adjacent to the existing Kiwanis Splash Pad. Installation is scheduled for 2024 with 2023 as an option if all necessary funds are raised.



SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital is donating \$7,500 to support an ADA-compliant all-inclusive playground for children ages five to 12 years.

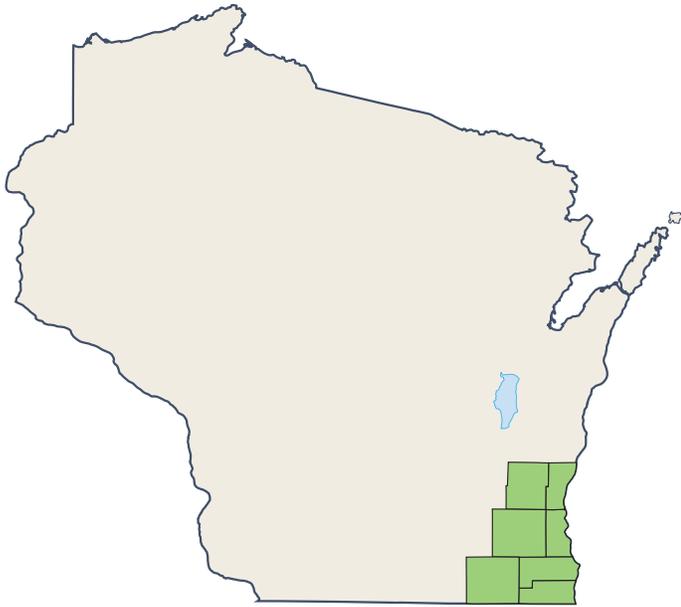
The playground will be home to more than 40 features, including swings, climbers, slides and spinners—with much of the equipment being designed to be used by children of all abilities. The poured, rubberized safety surface will ensure the playground will be ADA-accessible.

“Research findings have consistently shown the incredible benefits of inclusive playgrounds,” according to DeAnn Thurmer, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital president. “They foster social interaction, promote physical activity, and enhance cognitive development among children of all abilities.”

This will be the first all-inclusive playground at a county-owned park.

“The Ripon area needs an inclusive all-abilities park for everyone, regardless of their physical or developmental ability. Inclusive play promotes understanding, reduces prejudices and supports social integration,” says Joan Karsten, Early Bird Kiwanis Club immediate past president, who initiated the park discussions during her term as president.

# Southeastern Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$1,154,238,173**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Ascension Wisconsin Expands Dental Services in Southeast Wisconsin

#### Ascension St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee

In a continued effort to reduce health disparities, Ascension Seton Dental Clinic, located in Ascension St. Francis Hospital in Milwaukee, has been providing urgent care dental services to those who are underinsured or uninsured for more than 20 years. Last year, Ascension Seton Dental Clinic treated more than 2,800 patients.



*Dr. Charles Kosowski treats a patient at Ascension Seton Dental Clinic located at Ascension St. Francis Hospital in Milwaukee.*

Partnering with schools across Southeastern Wisconsin, multiple homeless shelters, community clinics and additional locations across Milwaukee County, Ascension Seton Dental offers examinations, X-rays, cavity treatment, basic extractions and treats emergencies.

Dentists and registered dental hygienists at Ascension Seton Dental understand the connection between healthy teeth and gums, and systemic health, particularly in areas of cardiovascular health, management of diabetes, improvement of maternal health and pediatric health.

In November of 2022, Ascension Seton Dental Clinic expanded its reach beyond Ascension St. Francis, and is providing urgent dental care services at Outreach Community Health Center (OCHC), a Federally Qualified Health Center. The Ascension Seton Dental Urgent Care Clinic at OCHC is open two days per week, with the ability to expand days and hours based on patient need.

The Ascension Seton Mobile Dental program continues to provide an even wider reach and improved access throughout the community. The mobile dental program supports adults and children at various community settings, such as Ascension Angel of Hope Clinic, Ascension St. Ben's Clinic, early learning centers, schools and homeless shelters.

### Care When it is Needed Most

#### Aurora Medical Center - Burlington

Sarah received care in the emergency department at Aurora Medical Center-Burlington. During her visit, she asked if there was someone who worked there who could help her find a way to pay her bill. The emergency department team connected Sarah to the hospital's financial advocate.

Sarah explained to the advocate she was uninsured because she could not afford group insurance through her employer. She also revealed that she was experiencing additional financial hardship as she had just left an abusive situation and was starting over on her own. Sarah had several complicated medical issues she needed support with and was concerned about the cost of her medical care.

The financial advocate worked with Sarah to complete a financial assessment. Through this assessment, the advocate determined Sarah was eligible for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program. This approval was for the care she already received and the follow-up care she needed.

When she received the news, Sarah's response was, "I am so grateful for the care I received and for the opportunity to continue with the additional care in need to truly move forward with my healing."

## Help When Emergencies Happen

### Aurora Medical Center – Kenosha

A man was working at his brother's home when a piece of machinery fell on him, severely injuring his foot.

The man's brother immediately jumped into action and took him to the Emergency Department at Aurora Medical Center - Kenosha. The man required emergency surgery and an inpatient stay. Upon discharge, he also needed ongoing wound care.

The man has full-time employment and was uninsured. Unsure of how he would be able to pay his hospital expenses, the man asked to speak with the hospital's Financial Advocate.

He told the Advocate that he had been living with his brother as he didn't have a steady income. He was working on projects around the house as a way to thank his brother for letting him stay there. He already had a large amount of debt that he was trying to pay down and was concerned about paying his medical bills.

The Financial Advocate helped the man complete a financial assessment. Through this assessment, the Advocate was able to determine that the man was eligible for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

When they heard the news, both the man and his brother thanked the Advocate. "Our family is so thankful for everything you've done. You have no idea how much this means to us all!"

## Help When Your Coverage Ends

### Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, Elkhorn

Wildfires can cause lung irritation and inflammation when you inhale small particles of smoke, leading to coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath.

That's exactly what happened to Cassie. Even as wildfire smoke covered the state of Wisconsin, Cassie needed to leave the safety of her filtered, air-conditioning to get to and from work. One day, when the smoke was particularly heavy in her area, Cassie started experiencing some scary symptoms. She went to the Emergency Department at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center for help.

Cassie required breathing tests and Asthma treatments to get her asthma controlled. This happened three times in total.

When she received her first bill, Cassie learned her insurance had lapsed. She called immediately to get it reinstated but

her coverage would not be backdated to cover her emergency hospital visits.

She called the hospital's Financial Advocate for help. After completing a financial assessment, Cassie was approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

## Interpreters and Financial Advocates Work Together

### Aurora Medical Center - Grafton

Xavier was driving home when he was involved in a car accident. After seeing how much pain he was in, his family member brought Xavier to Aurora Medical Center - Grafton to have his injuries assessed.

Xavier's primary language is Spanish, so a Language Interpreter met with him electronically to help him work with the Emergency Department team to explain what had happened. The Interpreter also helped him understand what his provider needed to communicate about his care.

Fortunately, the provider in the Emergency Department determined that Xavier's injuries were minor and was able to discharge him to go home once his exam was complete. Relieved of this news, worry about the Emergency Department bill began to set in as Xavier had no health insurance.

The interpreter helped the financial advocate guide Xavier through the financial assessment process to explore his financial assistance options. Thanks to the assistance of the Spanish-speaking interpreter, the financial advocate was able to approve Xavier for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

## A Little Help Until Benefits Start

### Aurora Medical Center – Summit

Patrick, a single, middle-aged man was treated for heat stroke over the summer in the Emergency Department at Aurora Medical Center - Summit.

A few weeks after he was treated, he received a bill in the mail. Patrick immediately called the hospital's Financial Advocate.

"Patrick called me to let me know he has received two bills and wanted to let us know he is not ignoring us." The Advocate continued, "He wanted us to also know that he doesn't have many hours at work right now but that he plans to start paying the bill as soon as he can get more hours at work."



“When I asked Patrick if he had any medical insurance, he told me he did not, so I offered to complete a financial assessment and he agreed.”

The Advocate was able to approve Patrick for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

“When I told Patrick he qualified for the financial assistance program and explained to him I would be writing off his hospital charges. He was shocked and couldn’t believe it,” said the Advocate. “He was so happy and kept saying how thankful he was and that he couldn’t believe this was really happening.”

## When Surgery is the Only Option

### Aurora Medical Center - Washington County, Hartford

A young man needed surgery but was uninsured and had been living on a limited income.

While debating his options related to surgery, he called the Financial Advocate at Aurora Medical Center – Washington County.

When the Advocate answered, the man explained his situation and asked if they had payment plan options he could consider.

The Advocate asked the man if he would be comfortable completing a financial assessment with her. He agreed.

Following the assessment, the Advocate determined the man was eligible for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

The man was so overwhelmed by the approval, he began to cry. He said to the Advocate, “I can’t begin to tell you how thankful I am. I need this surgery but there is no way I could have paid for it on my own.”

## Help When Struggling to Make Ends Meet

### Aurora Medical Center – Mount Pleasant

Ed was eligible for his employer’s insurance plan, but he declined coverage because he couldn’t afford the premiums. Even though he works full time, it’s barely enough to cover his basic living expenses.

After weeks of avoiding care, Ed began experiencing some concerning symptoms. He went to a local Urgent Care seeking medical care. Upon his arrival, the Urgent Care team evaluated Ed and determined that he required services that were beyond the capabilities of the Clinic.

Ed was transferred to the Emergency Department at Aurora Medical Center – Mount Pleasant where he received the care he needed.

Upon discharge, the hospital’s Financial Advocate met with Ed and asked if he would like to complete a financial assessment. Ed agreed and they worked through the process together.

Following the assessment, Ed was approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

## Care at the Right Time

### Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa

A young man arrived at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital experiencing a mental health crisis. While speaking with a case manager, the man grew agitated and told the case manager he wanted to go home. He insisted that he needed to leave because he couldn't afford to pay.

When the patient's case manager learned the man was uninsured, he reached out to the hospital's Financial Advocate. The case manager informed the Advocate that it was important that this patient did not leave the facility because he was experiencing a serious mental health breakdown and he needed help now.

The financial advocate immediately met with the man and calmly walked through a financial assessment. Through the assessment, the Financial Advocate was able to share that he was approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

Thanks to that approval, the man stayed and was able to receive the behavioral health support he needed.

## Filling the Gap in Coverage

### Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Milwaukee

Sometimes patients require medical care before their benefits kick in.

When the Financial Advocate at Aurora Sinai Medical Center entered Geri's room, she could immediately see the confusion on Geri's face.

Geri told the advocate that she was just informed that her Medicaid had terminated, and she wasn't sure how she was going to pay for her upcoming surgery.

Geri and the advocate discussed the option of the special enrollment period with her employer since her Medicaid had just terminated, however, new coverage would not backdate to cover her current hospital stay. The Financial Advocate suggested they complete a financial assessment to see if there were any other programs Geri would be eligible for.

Thankfully, the Financial Advocate was able to approve Geri for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

Geri was immediately relieved, repeatedly thanking the Financial Advocate.

"I was just happy we found a way to help," said the Financial Advocate. "It was great to know we had a program that could help Geri now, so she didn't delay her medical care while waiting for her new insurance to start."

## Extra Help When Patients Choose Self Pay

### Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee

A local community clinic sent a patient to the Emergency Department at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center. He was treated for severe chest pain. When asked about insurance, he insisted that he was going to pay the bill on his own.

Following his discharge, a Financial Advocate reached out to the man about his self-pay bill balance.

She introduced herself and explained that she called to see if she could help him find another way to pay for the care he received. The man agreed to a financial assessment.

During the assessment, the patient explained that he was new to the United States and was concerned about his bill. He said he knew the bill would be expensive but that he was still in the process of applying for asylum, so he had no access to insurance or had limited funds to live off.

Following the assessment, the Financial Advocate was able to approve the patient for a 100% discount on the Emergency Care he received through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

The man was so thankful, not only for the financial assistance, but also for the positive experience he had with his care providers. He appreciated being shown compassion and respect regardless of his ability to pay.

## When Options are Limited

### Aurora St. Luke's South Shore, Milwaukee

Lou arrived at the Aurora St. Luke's South Shore for an emergency visit. Uninsured and undocumented, Lou was concerned about the financial impact of his hospital visit. Lou had been trying to find work but was struggling as he was an undocumented worker. Because he had no income, friends were supporting him financially.

After receiving the care he needed, Lou met with a Language Interpreter and a Financial Advocate who helped him complete a financial assessment. Unfortunately, Lou did not meet the criteria for the Emergency Alien Medicaid as the Financial Advocate hoped he would, but he was approved for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program. The approval not only covered his emergency visit, but also the follow-up care he required.

"I'm so thankful for this approval," Lou told the Advocate. "Without it, I probably would not have come back for the additional care I need."

## Help When the Unexpected Happens

### Aurora West Allis Medical Center, West Allis

Jada, 19, was estranged from her parents and lived alone in a small apartment. It would be another two months before she was eligible for insurance coverage through her employer.

Just when she felt she was getting ahead, she had an accident that led her to the Emergency Department at Aurora West Allis Medical Center. After a brief medical exam, the Emergency Room Provider determined Jada needed an urgent MRI.

Jada was distraught. She could barely pay rent that month and now she would have a hospital bill coming soon.

Aware of her situation, the Financial Advocate called Jada a few days after her hospital discharge. She asked if Jada would be willing to complete a financial assessment and she agreed. Following the assessment, the financial advocate informed Jada she qualified for a 100% discount through the Aurora Health Care Patient Financial Assistance Program.

“We were on the phone, but I could hear the tears in her voice,” said the Financial Advocate. “She was so very grateful, and her happiness definitely made my day, too!”

## Community Partnership with Children’s Wisconsin Offers Free Lead Testing for Milwaukee Children, Families

### Children’s Wisconsin-Milwaukee

In partnership with the MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary on Milwaukee’s near-north side, Children’s Wisconsin has been testing children for lead poisoning. The MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary is a multi-resource center that helps meet community members’ essential needs and provides connection to community and supportive resources. They typically serve those in the 53206 zip code where Milwaukee’s lead poisoning crisis is particularly serious.

Wisconsin is ranked among the top 10 states for highest percentages of children with elevated blood lead levels. Systemic inequities have led to disparities in lead exposure, with families with lower incomes and families of color disproportionately impacted.

Childhood lead poisoning results from hand-to-mouth behaviors involving environmental sources of lead, such as chipping or disturbed lead paint, lead dust, lead in the soil or lead water lines. Children impacted by lead poisoning can experience short- and long-term consequences, including decreased ability to learn, behavioral challenges, speech delays, hearing challenges, kidney damage and seizures.

Consistent and early blood lead level testing remains the best way to identify children experiencing lead poisoning.

One young child who visited the community testing event had never been tested for lead before. When Children’s performed their initial lead test, the level came back elevated, so the clinicians did a blood draw to confirm the finding at the City of Milwaukee Health Department lab. Unfortunately, the child’s blood lead level was extremely high, necessitating inpatient admission. The family didn’t have a primary care provider, so Children’s connected them to a Children’s pediatrician for ongoing care. Through more than a dozen events, Children’s has tested more than 125 children. Significantly, approximately one-third of the children tested had elevated blood lead levels, demonstrating the importance of this opportunity to provide free testing and ensure kids are connected to the follow-up care and support they may need.

## Patients Praise Community Outreach Health Clinic

### Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital

Doug McConeghy is a single dad to two teenagers and works long hours as a machinist for a Lannon company. Medical insurance is not offered through his company and Doug’s budget is tight. Purchasing medical insurance from a private insurance company would be costly.

“I was talking to my neighbor one day and he told me to try out the Community Outreach Health Clinic,” Doug said.



*Mahpara and Anwar Fazeel*

From the moment he entered the clinic, he found a friendly team of medical professionals ready to work with him on leading a healthier lifestyle.

“They make me feel so special,” he said. “I can’t imagine this place without them.”



Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin providers and staff providing free skin, hair and nails screenings at Gee's MKE Wellness Clinic

Doug is treated for Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and depression. He visits the clinic every three months for checkups and medication refills.

"Our community is so lucky to have this clinic nearby," Doug said. "The nurses and volunteers are amazing and knowledgeable, and they work hard to keep so many people healthy."

Mahpara and Anwar Fazeel visit the clinic for routine checkups and to pick up prescriptions for their chronic conditions, including diabetes, hypertension and thyroid issues. The couple drives to the clinic from their home in Butler where they are raising three kids.

"They take good care of us," said Mahpara, who homeschools her children while her husband is a delivery driver. "They always greet us with a happy face."

Mahpara learned about the clinic through a friend and has been a patient since 2019. She appreciates how she can be seen by the nurses and volunteer doctors and medical professionals and pick up medications in one place. "It's such a relief that we found the clinic, and we are so satisfied with every visit," she said.

## Barbershop Partnership Connects People to Community Resources

### Froedtert Hospital, Wauwatosa

The Froedtert & MCW health network is a founding partner of Gee's MKE Wellness Clinic inside Gee's Clippers, a barbershop on Milwaukee's north side. The clinic builds on the trust and strength of the barbershop comradery among African American men to connect individuals to community resources and primary care, behavioral health and social services.

Froedtert & MCW community outreach nurses provide blood pressure, glucose and body mass index screenings and health education at Gee's Clinic. In April 2022, dermatologists screened more than 60 community members at a free skin, hair and nails event at Gee's. Early screening and detection can help can save lives. People of color have a higher risk of dying from skin cancer.

## Albrecht Free Clinic Helps Patient with Extensive Dental Treatment

### Froedtert West Bend Hospital, West Bend

In March 2022, the Albrecht Free Clinic received a new patient application for dental care with a handwritten note that said, "Before I can start my chemotherapy/radiation treatment, I am in desperate need of help because I do not have dental insurance."

After speaking with Mike, 54, the dental team learned that he had stage II squamous cell carcinoma, a form of skin cancer that is slow growing but can be aggressive. Mike indicated that he needed a cleaning and multiple teeth extracted before his oncologist would move forward with his cancer treatment. Mike is unable to work because he has agoraphobia, an anxiety disorder that prevents him from leaving the house and being in public spaces.

Four days after his application was received, Mike had 10 teeth removed. After two additional appointments for extractions, his dental work was completed in early April, and Mike's oncologist was able to proceed with his cancer treatment.

Mike is extremely thankful for the Albrecht Free Clinic and is happy to share his story if it helps others in need. Despite his agoraphobia, Mike did extremely well during his extractions and developed a friendly rapport with our volunteer dentists. Once Mike's cancer treatment is complete, the Albrecht Free Clinic will restore Mike's smile as part of its partials and dentures program.

The Albrecht Free Clinic is proud to help Mike improve his overall health and confidence.

## *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

### **Empowering Women to Rise Up**

#### **Ascension All Saints Hospital, Racine**

Rise Up is a program that supports mothers with young children who are interested in pursuing a career in healthcare or adjacent roles at Ascension All Saints Hospital. The program is a collaboration between Ascension All Saints Hospital, Higher Expectations, and Goodwill Industries.

The cohort model brings a group of motivated individuals together while they gain the education and training needed to work toward high demand careers at Ascension, while also engaging in group learning experiences, job shadowing, one-on-one coaching, and financial wellness support. Participants have support in applying and interviewing for career track roles, while also participating in one-on-one success coaching and monthly cohort meetings.

The program provides the following:

- Transportation assistance
- Technology assistance
- Costs of tests and materials
- One-on-one coaching and career counseling
- Scholarships towards furthering education

Skills learned in the Rise Up program helped Barbara to land a job as a patient access representative at Ascension All Saints Hospital, something she did not think was possible before the program. "Rise Up really got me moving to improve my skills so I could make a change," Barbara said.

Participants can select a career pathway of their choice and begin workplace training toward earning short-term credentials and/or certificates.

### **Students get Hands-on Experience at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital**

#### **Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Milwaukee Campus**

Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Milwaukee Campus has worked with the Milwaukee Public Schools' School to Work program for more than 30 years.

School to Work is a community assessment training program primarily focused on high school age students with disabilities. Having participants as old as 21, the goal of the program is to help develop the skills and experience necessary to achieve their highest level of independence by exposing them to different work environments. Some of these students are hired by Ascension Wisconsin, but many also receive job offers elsewhere.

Throughout last year at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital, nine students were paired with mentors and learned skills in a variety of areas including in the volunteer office, environmental service, food service, linen, and materials management, among others. The weekly sessions provided an opportunity to practice and demonstrate these skills in a supportive work environment.

The program also helps these students throughout the hiring process, including how to apply for a job, polishing their interview skills, while providing additional instruction, support, feedback and positive reinforcement.

"One of my first students that I had still calls me to check in a few times a year, so they do really value the relationship we form," said Kerry Burmeister, Director of Volunteer Services. "The students are so helpful to our departments. Our associates really miss them when they're on school breaks."

The MPS student participants committed more than 2,300 hours of volunteer time, working alongside Ascension Wisconsin associates for at least 230 of those hours.

This MPS School to Work program also extends to Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - St. Joseph Campus. Ascension Columbia St. Mary's - Ozaukee Campus also offers a similar program for Homestead High School.

## Project SEARCH

### Froedtert Hospital, Wauwatosa

We partner with TransCEN Inc./Creative Employment Opportunities and The Threshold Inc. to offer Project SEARCH at Froedtert Hospital and Froedtert West Bend Hospital. The nine-month internship program provides adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities on-the-job training and skills development, with the goal of securing year-round job placement.



Froedtert Hospital Project SEARCH Interns

In 2022, 10 interns graduated from the program following rotations with Supply Chain, Food and Nutrition Services, Environment Services, Transport Services, Pharmacy and Sports Medicine. Our health network hired three after graduation. Since 2015, Froedtert Health has hired about two dozen Project SEARCH interns. Creative Employment Opportunities awarded Froedtert Hospital its 2022 Impact Award for our Project SEARCH program.

## Children's Wisconsin Promoting Workforce Development and Diversity Through Community Partnerships

### Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Children's Wisconsin believes that building the health care career pipeline starts early, with investments in many partnerships to reach and inform early learners about careers at Children's Wisconsin. Through participation in the Metro Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce's Be the Spark initiative, Children's Wisconsin staff met with Milwaukee Marshall High Students to discuss the pathway to their career.

Children's Wisconsin staff also provided interview coaching to students at Bradley Tech High School. Recently, students from Reagan High School's Health Occupations Association visited Children's Wisconsin's Milwaukee campus for an immersive, hands-on experience to learn about several health careers, including in Surgical Services, Pharmacy, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), Respiratory, Laboratory and Imaging.

Last year, Children's Wisconsin began a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee and Herzing University to offer resume assistance, mock interviews, career coaching and career exploration sessions in Information Technology, Nursing, Dental Hygiene and Surgical Technology. Herzing University provides certified nursing assistant training to Boys & Girls Club members and to-date, seven nursing assistant graduates have been hired by Children's Wisconsin to work in its hospital units.

In addition, Children's Wisconsin offers apprenticeships, a variety of internships, as well as training and education opportunities for all stages of learners to gain valuable work experience. Our commitment to excellence and delivering high-quality care drives us to recruit top talent that represents a variety of perspectives, knowledge and experience. These partnership efforts, among others, are key to building the health care workforce.

## Mentorship Program Helps Introduce Students to Health Care Careers

### ProHealth Waukesha Memorial Hospital, Waukesha

ProHealth Care has worked with partners in education for many years to help students explore a variety of health care careers. Presentations, tours and other opportunities have helped students learn and make connections with ProHealth as a major local employer.



Nurse Peggy Hazelberg (left) from the Waukesha Family Medicine Residency at ProHealth Care with Waukesha South High School student Taylor Masch.

A new career pathways program coordinated by the Waukesha Family Medicine Residency at ProHealth Care provides job shadowing and mentoring for local high school students interested in health care careers. It's designed for students enrolled in Waukesha South High School's Academy of Health Professions. Many academy students aspire to be the first in their families to attend college.

ProHealth physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, medical assistants, social workers, interpreters, X-ray technicians and medical laboratory specialists engage with the students in the program. Job shadowing takes place in a clinical setting. Students can choose an occupation of interest and meet with mentors individually to discuss career and college options, and how to complete college and scholarship applications.

Field trips, workshops and events are scheduled to introduce the students to special topics including human anatomy, basic life support, first aid and suturing. Transportation is provided by ProHealth. Dinners include time to network. Parents are invited to events that include discussions about careers and education options.

Ten students benefitted from the mentoring program in its first year.

“The whole program is very good,” one student said. “I like getting the opportunity to visit patients and to see what a career in this profession would be like.”

## Rogers Behavioral Health Grows, Develops Workforce Through Innovative Approaches

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc

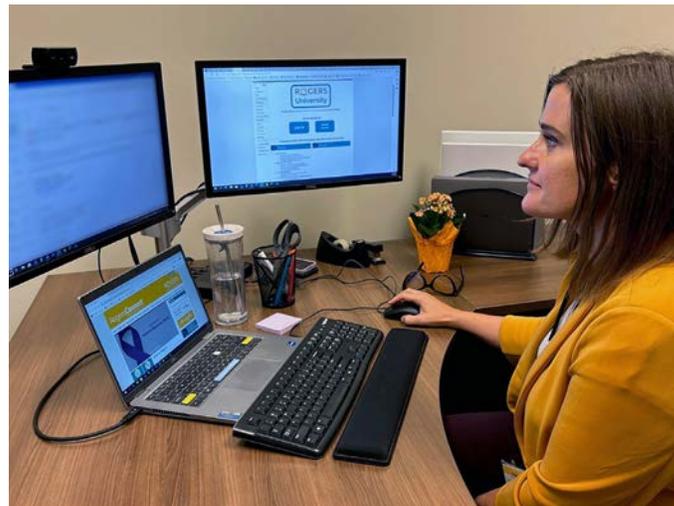
Rogers Behavioral Health is transforming HR practices to be responsive to changing workforce needs.

Three recent workforce initiatives are making a significant difference:

First, Rogers retooled its approach to onboarding new employees, focusing on the window from the time a candidate accepts an offer through the first 100 days of employment. This experiential approach includes a combination of traditional classroom learning blended with enhanced peer coaching and support from leadership.

In addition, Rogers has implemented a leadership curriculum developed in house by doctorate prepared instructional designers and a variety of subject matter experts to create a custom curriculum to specifically suit the needs of Rogers’ organization.

Finally, Rogers is intensifying training to ensure employees are well equipped to address challenging situations they encounter, particularly related to patient safety with those in a mental health crisis. Rogers has increased training of all patient care team members beyond regulatory requirements for nonviolent crisis intervention. Strengthening skills increases the job satisfaction of the team, which in turn improves their performance and reduces turnover.



Senior leaders across Rogers Behavioral Health focus transformative HR practices to enhance workforce

“Our approach to employee experience centers on connection to Rogers values of Compassion, Excellence, and Accountability,” said Jamie Wood, executive director of transformation. “We are always improving our methods and prioritize learning at all stages of our teammates’ development.”

## Health Equity

### Ascension Smart Smiles Program Expands Access to Oral Health Care

#### Ascension All Saints Hospital, Racine

Ascension Smart Smiles is the largest provider of school-based oral healthcare in Wisconsin. Last fall it expanded its services through Ascension All Saints Hospital in Racine, providing services to more than 1,200 students at 10 schools in the Racine Unified School District.

Specializing in preventive oral healthcare for children, Ascension Smart Smiles dental teams know that better oral health correlates to optimal overall health. The services they provide contribute to healthier habits as children get older.

Tooth decay is one of the most common childhood chronic diseases. When left untreated, tooth decay can have serious consequences, including problems with eating, speaking and learning. In addition, studies show children with poor oral health are more likely to experience dental pain, miss school, and underperform in school. On average, children in the United States miss about 51 million hours of school each year due to dental pain.

“The impact of Smart Smiles is incredible. The program has taken something that can be very stressful for families—coordinating a trip to the dentist—and made it easily

accessible,” said Chelsea Chatman-Zierk, Ascension Smart Smiles Dental Hygienist. “Smart Smiles opens the door for those who may have not been able to access dental care, and being able to offer this program to our community is a truly incredible gift.”



*Registered dental hygienists and dental assistants provide preventive and urgent dental care to children in Racine who would not otherwise have access.*

The Ascension Smart Smiles program sends treatment teams, which consist of a registered dental hygienist and dental assistant, into Racine schools to serve children in need. The mobile dentistry program provides dental screenings, fluoride treatments, sealants, and oral health education to school children from K4 through 8th grade.

Ascension Smart Smiles began providing preventive dental care to students in the Greater Milwaukee area in 2001. In 2022, more than 16,000 children received these much-needed services at 107 participating Milwaukee County schools.

## Making Healthy Foods and Health Care More Accessible

### Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital- Milwaukee Campus

The Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center and Food Pantry has been a fixture in the Milwaukee community for many years providing access to needed health care services, health education, health screenings and healthy food for vulnerable and at-risk individuals.

Through Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Milwaukee Campus, the Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center provides access to highly experienced registered nurses, nurse practitioners and community health workers dedicated to caring for high-risk senior citizens, moms-to-be and diabetic patients.

Additional services include:

- Health screenings focused on diabetes prevention
- Management of high blood pressure and referral to primary care
- Cooking demonstrations and diet knowledge
- Alzheimer's and cancer support groups

Navigation to other community resources and Ascension wellness programs

In addition to a unique infant needs pantry where moms can get formula and diapers, the Ascension Ebenezer Food Pantry, provides access to the city's only diabetic-friendly food pantry where people are able to choose low-sodium foods, low-carbohydrate foods, fresh fruits and vegetables.

While many food pantries closed in the city during the pandemic, the Ascension Ebenezer Food Pantry expanded its hours of operation serving more than 6,000 individuals in 2020. Today, the pantry serves 500 individuals a month, 55% of whom have a family member with high blood pressure and 31% have a family member with diabetes.



*Ascension Wisconsin parish nurse, Julia Means, tests the blood pressure of a patient at the Ascension Ebenezer Resource Center and Food Pantry in Milwaukee.*

Community members who visit the Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center and Food Pantry can expect care that treats the whole person—body, mind and spirit, with a focus on listening with compassion and offering hope along with prevention and wellness programs.

## Reducing Barriers and Saving Lives at Ascension St. Francis Hospital

### Ascension St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee

Ascension St. Francis Hospital's Su Salud Program offers access to 3D mammography screening, bilingual breast health education, patient navigation and diagnostic services to women who are underinsured and uninsured while reducing barriers to the care they need.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among Latina and Hispanic women. Early detection through screening mammography can save lives. Having a 90% Spanish-speaking patient base, Su Salud, Spanish for “Your Health,” encourages women 40 years and older to participate in the program by making connections within the community, overcoming language and other barriers.

The program’s goals are:

- Improving access to mammography and primary care
- Removing financial barriers
- Removing language barriers
- Community education

Partnering with local churches, community clinics, and other organizations, Su Salud is partially funded by a grant that enables the program to provide additional patient support and to cover the cost, or a portion of the mammogram cost. Last year Su Salud was able to get 819 women the mammograms they need.

When transportation is an issue, a ride to the appointment is offered at no cost to the patient. Su Salud’s mobile mammography unit also travels to events and community clinics throughout the Milwaukee area providing mammograms and education.

Through Su Salud, thousands of women have received mammograms since 2004 as the program continues to create understanding and access to a compassionate support system for women who have traditionally been reluctant to engage in or otherwise excluded from life-saving breast cancer screenings.

## Successfully Reducing Blood Sugar Levels in Adults with Diabetes

### Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - St. Joseph Campus, Milwaukee

More than 37 million Americans live with diabetes. Managing and preventing complications can be a struggle for many people. The Under 8 Program, based out of Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - St. Joseph Campus, is an initiative designed to reduce blood sugar levels, referred to as the Hgb A1c values, to under 8.0 in high-risk African American patients with diabetes.

Over the course of a 12-week period, Under 8 aims to help reduce the average A1c from 0.5-1.0% through dietary and lifestyle changes. Under 8 serves as a diabetes support group where participants receive screenings, healthy food and education from providers and guest speakers.

Using a team-based care model to promote healthy behavior and improved diabetes care and outcomes, Under 8 provides education on disease management, medication and adherence, the importance of glucose testing, smoking cessation, disease complications, exercise strategies, diet management and healthy cooking techniques.

Offering diabetic friendly prepared meals from Ascension Wisconsin’s community partner, UpStart Kitchen, as well as fresh produce from the Ascension Ebenezer Food Pantry at every meeting session, Under 8 provides participants with the tools and resources they need to prepare and eat healthy foods to effectively manage their eating habits.

“From the day I started Under 8, I felt love,” said Shelly, Under 8 Program participant. “I felt the support. The mental and emotional support from the group gave me strength, and I knew I was going to be ok.”

In 2023, participants saw an average reduction of 0.85% in their A1C by the end of the program.

This year, the Under 8 Program is expanding its outreach into the community by offering classes at the Ascension Angel of Hope Clinic which serves a primarily Hispanic population.

## Ascension Wisconsin Addresses Transportation Barriers to Ensure Patient Access Care

### Ascension Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Ascension Wisconsin’s commitment to being a leader in the advancement of health equity is an expression of its mission to improve the health of the community, particularly where those have long been underserved. Identifying social determinants of health is one important way to reduce preventable disparities in health outcomes. Advancing health equity begins by listening and understanding the needs of the patients and why Ascension developed a screening tool for its patients which identified transportation as a key barrier for them to access the care they need.

To help make sure patients could get to their appointments, Ascension Wisconsin began providing transportation services, at no cost. Designed for patients unable to obtain transportation resources, Ascension Wisconsin provided more than 10,000 rides through a ride sharing service, taking patients to and from their appointments in 2022.

After a patient is evaluated for their transportation needs, they’re able to connect with one of Ascension Wisconsin’s 250 staff dispatchers to secure a ride.

“One of the biggest barriers for our pregnant patients is transportation, and offering rides at no cost helps us overcome that barrier,” said Nubia Rojas, a social worker at Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - St. Joseph Campus. “We are very grateful to be able to provide this service and we’ve seen a sharp decrease in the number of no-show appointments as a result.”

For older patients, or patients who may require additional assistance and door-to-door care, Ascension Wisconsin utilizes Carepool, a rideshare program that specializes in transportation for aging adults and people with disabilities. In 2022 Carepool provided nearly 2,000 rides for Ascension Wisconsin patients.

Adequate and reliable transportation services are fundamental to healthy communities. By connecting patients to transportation, Ascension Wisconsin helps ensure patients can access preventive care and treat chronic conditions before they worsen.

“Patients tell us that without this service they would miss appointments and not be able to get to where they need to be,” Rojas said. “Providing ride sharing transportation is our safety net and helps patients get to their appointments or get home safely after a visit to the emergency room.”

## Children’s Wisconsin Community Health Advocates Support Families in Getting the Supports They Need

### Children’s Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Community health advocates at Children’s Wisconsin are certified community health workers and trusted members of the neighborhoods where they work, including Amani/Franklin Heights, Clarke Square, Lindsay Heights, Metcalfe Park and the near west side. In 2022, they helped more than 450 families whose needs extended beyond health care, supporting those who face challenging and vulnerable situations, which most often include housing concerns. They focus on the whole person and the social determinants of health to support families with overall health and well-being.

Children’s community health advocates support families by encouraging self-sufficiency and independence. They help individuals best meet their personal needs by building trust, identifying their priorities and most urgent needs, and setting goals with a pathway to accomplish them. After three months of working with the community health advocates, 57% of participants improved their financial, employment and food security, and 50% reported improved social support.

Mrs. W started working with Children’s community health advocates early on in her pregnancy. She really valued the team’s non-judgmental communication, reassurance and consistent follow-through. Mrs. W’s goals included finding a job, identifying a better place to live and doing a weekly check-up with the Children’s team. Over 18 months, the advocates helped her with securing employment and Mrs. W. went from partially homeless to finding the right housing to meet her needs. Tragically, during this time, Mrs. W’s baby girl passed away. Children’s community health advocates were there to support her and advocate alongside her journey of loss and transformation.

Mrs. W. regularly sees a counselor to support her mental health and well-being and now has become involved in helping others, connecting family members and acquaintances to Children’s when they need assistance. Mrs. W shares that she “gathered a lot, gained a lot and learned a lot from working with Children’s.”

## ProHealth Care Partners with Community Smiles Dental to Provide Free Dental Screenings

### ProHealth Oconomowoc Memorial Hospital, Oconomowoc

More than 250 ProHealth Medical Group clinic patients have been screened for dental concerns in a unique partnership with Community Smiles Dental. The screenings provide an opportunity for patients to ask questions about their dental health and learn about local resources. They also can receive a fluoride treatment, if recommended. The screenings take just a few minutes to complete but can have a big impact.



Community Smiles dental hygienist Nancy Soika (left) with ProHealth Medical Group clinic manager Kristen Farmer.

Of the patients screened, more than 85% qualified for Community Smiles Dental services and 80% had Medicaid coverage. About 10% were uninsured. More than 70% were new clinic patients.

The screening program began in 2022 as a joint effort between ProHealth Care and Community Smiles Dental to help improve the dental health of children, pregnant women and other community members. About 35% of those screened were under age 3, 45% were ages 4 to 12, and over 10% were ages 13 to 18. A small percentage were adults.

Patients are screened during visits for well-child and medical care. A Community Smiles dental hygienist who speaks Spanish and English is at the clinic weekly to provide the screenings and resources. The hygienist also can apply recommended fluoride treatments.

“Dental health is an important aspect of overall health,” said Heather Johnson, director of medical group operations for ProHealth. “Screening helps provide additional wellness services, especially for patients who have never visited a dentist.”

ProHealth is a longtime supporter of the dental clinic, which helps improve the lives of the underserved through oral health services, prevention education and patient advocacy.

## Community Coalition Supported by Rogers Behavioral Health Works to Reduce Stigma, Inspire Action

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc

Rogers Behavioral Health supports the Wise Initiative for Stigma Elimination (WISE), now a national coalition of organizations and individuals building resilient and hopeful communities by promoting inclusion and support for all who are affected by mental health and addiction challenges.

In collaboration with Rogers, WISE advances evidence-based practices for stigma reduction. People with mental health challenges sharing their recovery experiences in a credible way is the best-known way to reduce stigma. The coalition promotes the power of strategic contact with those in recovery to end stigma in schools, healthcare, congregations, and workplaces.

WISE committees that include community members plan speakers for quarterly virtual meetings that are free and open to all. The gatherings explore topics in the mental health field. This year’s meetings focus on Addressing Stigma at the intersection of substance use disorders and mental health. Experts in the field present and allow time for discussion and Q&A.

In Wisconsin, the Rogers team also represents WISE at a collaboration of 30+ organizations known as the Mental Health Civic Action Team. That team looks at ways non-profits can pool resources and assist one another in reaching out to the greater Milwaukee community to assist with mental health and substance use services.



*WISE is national coalition promoting inclusion and support for all affected by mental illness by advancing evidence-based practices for stigma reduction efforts*

The [eliminatestigma.org](http://eliminatestigma.org) website is a wealth of information for families, individuals, professionals around stigma and mental health challenges and is updated regularly with patient stories, blogs, and other relevant content.

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### EMS Outreach Increases Continued Educational Opportunities in Ozaukee Co.

#### Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Ozaukee

For the last two years, Ascension Columbia St. Mary's - Ozaukee Campus has worked with local firehouses, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and other Ozaukee County organizations with a common goal of providing the best care possible to the community.

EMS clinicians are unique and important members of the care team and enhancing EMS education can have significant impacts on patient safety and outcomes. The unified outreach efforts focus on continuing education for first responders through case reviews, ride-alongs, discussions with Ascension Wisconsin physicians and online learning platforms that balance basic knowledge with new information to help keep local EMS workers performing at their very best.

Instructors and speakers recognize this professional collaboration is vital to the healthcare system and effective communication supports the safe and effective transfer of care between prehospital and hospital providers.

“Everyone benefits when our communities are doing well,” Andrew Sandler, Ascension Wisconsin EMS service line, said. “After observing EMS efforts across the state, we decided to focus on progressive protocols, which results in top-notch training, improving the care our patients receive and ultimately making our community healthier.”

Outreach efforts also focus on improving an “integrated care management structure,” with surrounding hospitals. This means continuing to educate emergency room care teams about the prehospital care EMS crews provide before a patient arrives at the hospital. This understanding and communication can help provide patients with better care and reduce the number of readmissions.



*EMS outreach efforts include the opportunity to participate in a nurse ride-along*

With plans to expand outreach efforts to the Racine area, Sandler says he hopes these collaborative efforts will help improve efficiency across southeastern Wisconsin and contribute to the overall health and well-being of every patient.

## Ascension Franklin Helps Students Achieve Greater Independence

### Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Franklin Campus

The STRIDES program at Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Franklin Campus is designed to help students with special needs gain work experience and prepare them for the workforce. The STRIDES students from Oak Creek High School are a welcome addition to the hospital staff.

Several students work at Ascension Franklin each school year. The age of participants ranges from teenagers to young adults in their early twenties. Accompanied by a teacher, students work three-hour shifts, two to three days a week and accomplish skill-building, on-the-job training, and develop an independent connection in the community.

During this time, students develop important skills through working with hospital staff in various departments such as Environmental Services and the Emergency Room where they learn to make patient bags, clean, stock supplies and complete other important tasks. In addition to building physical skills, students build confidence with their improved social skills after interacting with hospital associates, and they benefit from positive experiences through goal setting and achievements.

This valuable work experience helps set the program participants up for long-term success. Upon program completion, these participants are better prepared for future employment in their community.

## Making Strides to Reduce Falls Among Older Adults

### Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Elmbrook Campus

More than 36 million older adults reported falling in 2018, resulting in 32,000 deaths. As our population of older adults grows, so does the number of falls and injuries. Recognizing this growing problem, Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Elmbrook Campus began a community outreach initiative in Brookfield with a goal to reduce the number of fall injuries presenting in the emergency room.

Designed for people who have experienced a fall or are concerned about falling, the Stepping On program is an evidence-based falls prevention program supported by the Wisconsin Institute of Healthy Aging. Ascension Elmbrook began offering the seven-week program in the fall of 2022. It has reduced the number of falls by program participants by more than 30%.

Led by Narin Avci, physical therapist, and Nancy Shea, pharmacist at Ascension Elmbrook, the two-hour classes teach strength and balance exercises. They also include guest speakers, such as vision care specialists and safety officers, who discuss topics like home safety hazards, how certain medications can cause increased risk of falls and how to stay safe when out in the community.

“The response from the participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Groups of friends all sign up together and many more friends are made along the way,” Shea said. “We're always sad when the classes end because they are truly fun and fulfilling.”



*Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Elmbrook Campus offers senior exercise and fall prevention classes for the Brookfield community.*

In addition to these classes, there are therapist-led senior exercise classes that are open to any community dwelling member with little to no mobility issues, over the age of 65. There is no charge to participate in the Stepping On program.

## Caring for our Cutest Community Members

### Aurora Medical Center – Burlington

What does it mean to be a responsible babysitter?

This is exactly the question Aurora Medical Center - Burlington answers through their Babysitter Workshops. Through these classes, youth participants learn:

- Basic first aid, CPR, and when to call 911
- How to identify potential hazards in the home
- Safe playtime activities
- Safe feeding guidelines
- Basic baby and toddler care

By the end of workshop participants will gain skills and confidence to provide safe and engaging childcare services. They will also build an understanding around the responsibilities and challenges associated with babysitting.

Our hospital community educator conducted six Babysitting basics classes in 2022 for 61 participants ages nine and older. Following completion of the class, 100% of the attendees demonstrated knowledge gained between pre- and post-tests.

## Partnering for Local Families

### Aurora Medical Center – Grafton

Today, more than ever before, health care professionals more accept the idea that social needs impact health. But as a health care provider, how do hospitals address those needs? One way Aurora Medical Center - Grafton addresses social determinants of health is by providing support to community partners with strong programming.

Ozaukee Food Alliance (OFA) is a non-profit organization providing warm meals, groceries, school supplies and support to families in need across Ozaukee County. During their first month in 2012 they served 23 families. Now, OFA services over 400 families each month.

Aurora Medical Center - Grafton leadership services on the OFA board. The hospital also proudly supports OFA through financial donations to their annual backpack program, which provides new school supplies to children in the Port Washington-Saukville School District. In addition to the donation, hospital teammates donate time to sort and pack the backpacks for the students.

Outside of the annual back to school backpack program, the hospital's community outreach nurse educator provides monthly education on food pantry evenings to OFA clients. Example educational topics include chronic disease, stroke prevention, heart health, cancer prevention, and healthy aging.

By providing financial and in-kind support as well as education, Aurora Medical Center - Grafton is doing everything we can to help Ozaukee Food Alliance achieve their mission.

## Keeping our Community Members Mobile

### Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, Elkhorn

Sitting down may feel great sometimes but too much sitting is not good for your health! Multiple health studies have linked a sedentary lifestyle to numerous chronic conditions.

Stand Up & Move More is an evidence-based behavior change program designed to reduce sedentary behaviors by providing older adults with strategies to stand more often and for longer durations throughout the day.

The Aurora Lakeland Medical Center partnered with Highlands of Geneva Crossing to offer this program for fourteen Geneva Crossing residents. All participants received a clicker counter and journal to log their time standing. Engaged participants reported:

- Reduced problems performing daily activities
- Reduced pain interference and intensity
- Improved functional performance
- Improved general overall health

## Heart and Soul

### Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee

Heart and Soul is a hypertension-prevention program helping community members reduce their blood pressure in holistic ways. Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic, Aurora Health Care Community Health and Aurora Health Care Faith and Health Partnerships teammates developed the program collaboratively.

The program, hosted at a local community faith site, provides participants with monitoring devices to help them track their blood pressure at home. Program participants also attend monthly sessions that include blood pressure screenings and education on a wide array of topics, such as how spiritual practices can help your heart health and how eating a nutritious diet and managing medications can keep you healthy.

Heart and Soul has transformed the lives of participants by giving them tools to manage their blood pressure and live healthier lives.

During the pilot program, one participant lost 50 pounds and lowered her blood pressure. Another participant learned the importance of reducing her work schedule and prioritizing time for rest and rejuvenation.

## Preventing Falls through Education

### Aurora St. Luke's South Shore, Milwaukee

Stepping On is an evidence-based program designed for people who are living at home and have experienced a fall or are concerned about falling. The seven-week program incorporates strategies to implement positive lifestyle changes to keep older adults independent, upright and active.

Aurora St. Luke's South Shore hosts this program annually. Teammates from multiple disciplines within the hospital come together to teach the health topics each week. The hospital's Director of Rehab Services says, "It is a wonderful way to help people stay and feel safe in the home. We can connect with people in a meaningful way and establish rapport with health care providers when they are not sick. If they do become sick, they feel comfortable coming into our facility and know because of their Stepping On experience that they will receive great care."

The response from community members has been positive as well.

One Stepping On Class Member shared, "I really enjoyed the course, and they taught me the value of exercise and fall prevention. The instructors did an excellent job of explaining

and performing live demo's on not only Fall Prevention, but what to do if a fall occurs. Unbelievably valuable information and the environment is so warm."

## Froedtert Hospital Earns Two Awards for Environmental Sustainability Performance

### Froedtert Hospital, Wauwatosa

Practice Greenhealth awarded Froedtert Hospital its 2022 Greenhealth Partner for Change Award and Greening the Operating Room Recognition Award. The awards recognize the hospital's commitment to environmental sustainability and to improving environmental performance in the operating room.



Froedtert Hospital's achievements include increasing recycling and decreasing the generation of medical waste; signing the Cool Food Pledge, an international effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by offering more plant-based food choices; increasing the percentage spent on sustainable procurement; and increasing the hospital's Energy Star rating for energy efficiency.

A focus on more sustainable operations supports healthier patients, staff and communities.

## Community Safety Classes Return

### Aurora Medical Center - Summit

After a three-year hiatus, the Aurora Medical Center - Summit has once again begun to host the AARP Safe Driver Course. The AARP Smart Driver course is a refresher course for drivers aged 50 years and older. Thanks to donations, this class is free for eligible community members.

The hospital's Trauma Program Coordinator teaches the course at our hospital campus. Our hospital team initially planned to host one course, but due to popularity, we added to the schedule and filled two additional classes!

Class participants learned:

- Key facts about the effects of medication on driving.
- How to reduce driver distractions.
- How to maintain the proper following distance behind another car.
- Proper use of safety belts, air bags, anti-lock brakes and technology found in cars today.

Our hospital teammates were excited to host community members onsite once again and look forward to offering additional evidence-based programming in the future.

## Supporting Child Development in Washington County

### Aurora Medical Center - Washington County, Hartford

Education is a social driver of health. Multiple studies have linked education to health behaviors, employment, income, and even life expectancy. This is why setting children up for educational success is a focus for the Aurora Medical Center – Washington County.

Each year, Washington County community agencies team up to host the Back-to-School Fair for children in need. A group of Aurora Medical Center – Washington County teammates have volunteered at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County site for the last three years. The teammates engage kids in education and play while they move through the backpack fair, collecting their necessary school supplies. In 2023, 750 area children received their brand-new backpack and school supplies between two fair sites.

Our work does not stop there. Some other examples of our partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Washington County includes:

- Our Pediatric Rehab Team provides education on child speech development, social emotional learning, and safety tips,
- Hospital leadership serve on the board,
- We financially support the Summer Meal Program, and
- Our community outreach nurse educator manages all aspects of outreach education including first aid/ CPR training, mental health, physical activity, and nutrition.

Through this work, Aurora Medical Center – Washington County hopes to provide children from underserved communities with the resources they need to be successful on their education journey.

## Bringing Systems Together to Provide Integrated Treatment to Teens Experiencing Chronic Pain and Mental Health Challenges

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc

Rogers Behavioral Health, Children’s Wisconsin, and the Medical College of Wisconsin are collaborating on an innovative care model that creates better access to mental and behavioral healthcare for Wisconsin teens.

The Integrated Healing Program is an intensive outpatient program for teenagers struggling with debilitating pain and related functional disorders along with depression and anxiety. This unique program combines a team of multidisciplinary experts that include Rogers' child and adolescent psychiatrists and psychologists, along with medical, health psychology, and physical therapists from the Jane B. Pettit Pain and Headache Center at Children's Wisconsin.



*Mick Collins, PT, DPT, physical therapist at Children’s Wisconsin, uses education and exercise to help teens develop strategies to overcome chronic pain and mental health challenges*

More than 100 teens have received treatment in the program with over 90% of patients showing overall improvement in physical functioning, pain reduction, quality of life, and emotional well-being.

“This program treats teens holistically by addressing their physical, emotional, and social needs and gives families a much-needed care option for a patient population that is difficult to treat and often overlooked”, says Gregory Evangelatos, MD, board-certified attending psychiatrist at Rogers Behavioral Health in Brown Deer. He adds, “It’s gratifying to work alongside Children’s Wisconsin and the Medical College of Wisconsin to deliver this unique, comprehensive, and personalized care to teens who are suffering.”

## Efforts to Prevent, Address Violence in Our Communities

### Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Children's Wisconsin and community members across the state are dedicated to addressing violence and promoting safety. The increase in violence in our communities is a complex public health epidemic that requires multi-pronged, collaborative solutions. Violence impacts far beyond the immediate victims and greatly impacts a child's growth and development.

Children's Wisconsin has invested in trusted efforts to address violence holistically at home, in school and in the community. Our teams, consisting of clinicians, community health workers and child well-being professionals support children and families by working with community partners. They offer care, resources, education and support on topics such as positive parenting and family functioning, safe firearm storage, child abuse prevention and healthy ways to process trauma. They also offer connections to resources for housing, food, education and health care. Children's offers free e-learning programs for schools across the state on bullying prevention and mental and emotional health.

When Children's Wisconsin started Project Ujima, it was one of the first hospital-based violence and crisis intervention programs in the nation. Through case management, social and emotional support, youth development and mentoring, mental health and medical services, Project Ujima is supporting more kids and families than ever to stop the cycle of violence. Recently, an expectant mom with a child enrolled in the program after her mother was killed. Her entire family benefitted from Project Ujima's services and were connected to therapy, childcare, food resources, car seat support and the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) which helps parents manage common child and family behaviors and emotions.

In addition to providing research support for Project Ujima, several Children's Wisconsin providers are involved in violence prevention research, including understanding risk factors, long-term outcomes, follow-up care needs and more. These and other efforts are key to advancing solutions to address violence in our communities.

## Housing is Health Program Informs DHS CHIP Health Services Initiative to Increase Housing Navigation Support

### Milwaukee Health Care Partnership, Milwaukee

Housing is Health, a housing navigation program created by the four Milwaukee health system members of the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership (MHCP)—Aurora Health Care, Ascension Wisconsin, Children's Wisconsin, and Froedtert Health—is both creating local impact and influencing new housing navigation policy state-wide.

It is well established that housing is one of the most significant social drivers of health and the most complex and expensive social resource to navigate and secure for patients. The Housing is Health program works in collaboration with Milwaukee County Housing Services and IMPACT Coordinated Entry to screen and refer homeless/vulnerably housed patients receiving ER or inpatient care at Milwaukee's health systems for housing support. Navigators then help patients secure temporary housing, provide case management, secure supportive services, and aid in their transition to permanent housing.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), leveraging the success, learnings, and staff support of the Housing is Health Program, established a new benefit through the Children's Health Insurance Program Health Services Initiative (CHIP), to provide housing support (housing navigation, transitional, relocation, and sustaining support) to low-income families across Wisconsin. This initiative led to new housing resources in Milwaukee and other communities throughout the state for families with children under 18 and pregnant individuals who are living below 200% FPL and experiencing homelessness (or are at imminent risk).

Informing state and local health care policies, programs, and payment reforms is a shared priority of the MHCP and its health system members. The health systems look forward to integrating this new support into current local housing navigation structures and exploring additional avenues for reimbursable navigation support.

Since 2019, Housing is Health has connected 322 patients to temporary housing and facilitated permanent housing for 262 patients across all care settings.

Current funding for the program is provided by the Milwaukee-based health systems via their MHCP Shared Community Investment Fund.

# Southern Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$323,904,869**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Forensic Nursing Program

#### UnityPoint Health-Meriter, Madison

The Forensic Nurse Examiners Program (formerly known as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners program or SANE) at UnityPoint Health-Meriter strives to offer unique and care to victims of sexual assault, child sexual abuse, elder abuse and domestic violence.

The Forensic Nurse Program is the only program of its kind in the state of Wisconsin. It has provided care and healing to more than 10,000 victims of all ages, genders, races and populations since 1988.

The Forensic Nursing Program is staffed by registered nurses who have advanced education in medical-forensic examination, psychological and emotional trauma. UnityPoint Health-Meriter forensic nurses conduct a physical exam, collect of medical-forensic evidence, assist with reporting the crime to police, screen for sexually transmitted infection and pregnancy, and do safety planning and follow up care—all in a safe, compassionate manner.

Meriter helps all patients regardless of their ability to pay. Meriter accepts all commercial insurance providers and victims are welcome to use those if they choose. However, if a patient prefers not to use insurance due to confidentiality reasons, we apply for a reimbursement through the WI Safe

Fund, which can provide financial assistance for the cost of a forensic medical exam. If the patient does not have medical coverage, the patient could be eligible for assistance from the Crime Victim Compensation Fund or the Uncompensated Care Program through Meriter.

### Touched Twice Community United Clinic

#### Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital and Clinic, Portage

Two Physicians from Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital and Clinic in Portage took part in the Touched Twice United Clinic on Saturday, Aug. 12 at the Columbia County Fairgrounds.

Dr. Susan Kruckman and Dr. Jill Pogorelec provided free sports physicals to participants at the event, which is a nationwide program that Portage/Columbia County participated in for three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year was the first year Touched Twice was back in Portage since the pandemic began.



*Dr. Susan Kruckman and Dr. Jill Pogorelec of Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital and Clinic provided free sports physicals at the Touched Twice Community United Clinic in Portage*

In addition to the Aspirus Divine Savior-provided sports physicals, services provided included chiropractic care, vision tests, massage therapy, hot meals, family portraits, a food pantry, a clothes giveaway, haircuts, kids activities and counseling.

Organizers say the main point of Touched Twice is to remind people in need that help is available with all services and products donated by local businesses and volunteers.

## Quality Care for All – The Good Neighbor Clinic

### Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac

Sauk Prairie Healthcare is committed to improving the health of our communities. For 67 years, we have provided quality care to more than 45,000 patients in our service area across our four primary care clinics, 36-bed acute care 501(c)(3) hospital, and Wellspring facility.

As leaders in driving community health, we know the importance of ensuring everyone has equal access to quality care. In an effort to close this gap, we provide support to the Good Neighbor Clinic, a free primary care clinic founded by the late Dr. Haakon Carlson. In 2022, Sauk Prairie Healthcare provided \$265,866 in free medical services to the clinic's patients. We also lease the clinic space at a reduced cost to the Good Neighbor Clinic, as well as donate supplies for labs and procedures.



*The Good Neighbor Clinic exterior in Prairie du Sac*

Since it first opened, the Good Neighbor Clinic has seen more than 30,000 patient visits from those without medical insurance.

## SSM Health Brings Multi-Vaccine Clinics to the Community

### SSM Health Wisconsin Region, Madison

Expanding upon the health system's successful mobile COVID-19 vaccine clinic model, SSM Health is now offering common school-required vaccinations in safe, community settings. Over the past year, the health system has partnered with area school districts, Public Health Madison Dane County and area health and insurance partners to bring important vaccines out to community events like school registration, community events and individual schools.

These additional partnerships helped SSM Health identify which vaccines area families were falling behind on during the pandemic to prioritize making them more readily available in the community. Through coordination with area school districts and public health, this team offers COVID-19, influenza, Hepatitis B, HPV, Meningococcal, MMR, Polio, Tdap and Varicella vaccines. Vaccines are often offered on a walk-in basis, team members verify which vaccines are needed with the state immunization registry, then the vaccines are given on site by volunteer vaccinators. As part of this partnership, SSM Health provides vaccine product, staff to prepare vaccines, as well as operational support for each clinic.



*A volunteer vaccinator administers a vaccine to a Madison area eighth grader.*

To date, the mobile vaccine clinic team has coordinated 159 multi-vaccine clinics across our service area. Additional clinics are scheduled this fall at area community sites and schools. These mobile clinics, held during school registration, picture days and parent teacher conferences, are well received. Additional clinics are hosted during community celebrations and at locations that serve individuals who may have barriers to accessing traditional healthcare settings. Families often express their gratitude for the additional access to vaccines in convenient, safe and trusted community settings.

## Ensuring Equitable Financial Assistance

### UW Health, Madison

UW Health offers a generous financial assistance program to patients who are unable to pay for the care provided at UW Health. Patients work with dedicated staff members to apply for financial assistance to cover all or a portion of their bill. In FY22, UW Hospital and Clinics' financial assistance program provided \$20.4 million of charity care at cost.

To improve our financial assistance program, finance department leaders conducted a health equity lens review

of the financial assistance policy and financial counseling practices at UW Health. While the policy itself didn't change, a few of the practices around it did, removing unintentional barriers for patients and improving the objectivity of the approval process. The review process revealed that the complexity of the application process posed challenges for patients who did not have access to technology or the needed documentation, and who may be uncomfortable sharing highly sensitive information with strangers. Some patients with overwhelming medical bills did not meet the income requirement for financial assistance, while some UW Health care team members didn't know help is available as they lacked awareness about the financial assistance policy.

With this new awareness in mind, the finance department made the following critical changes:

- Began using credit bureau, demographic and behavioral data from a vendor to relieve the burden on patients to provide financial documentation. The vendor provides information that is used to determine which patients are most likely to qualify for 100% financial assistance;
- Implemented an ongoing education program for clinical care teams about the financial assistance policy; and
- Established a routine review of financial assistance education provided during employee onboarding to ensure it is up to date.

UW Health is proud to provide a generous and equitable financial assistance program.

## *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

### **Educational Partnerships, Apprenticeships Encourage New Generation of Caregivers**

#### **SSM Health Wisconsin Region, Madison**

SSM Health Wisconsin continued to encourage the next generation to join the health care workforce in 2023 through several new partnership programs. SSM Health inaugurated a 12-month Ophthalmic Assistant Apprenticeship Program in concert with Madison College and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development to train students in direct patient care tasks, processes, and procedures to assist in a broad range of eye and vision care services. Students incurred no out-of-pocket costs to participate and will enjoy paid positions within SSM Health upon graduation from the program.

In Madison, SSM Health partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County on a paid internship program to teach young people about the skilled trades—electrical work, plumbing and carpentry. Over the summer months at SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital-Madison, the intern received hands-on experience working on various projects, including servicing a pneumatic tube system and several refrigeration units in the laboratory and cafeteria. The program was so successful, the plant operations director has contacted another Boys & Girls Club in the Fond du Lac area to encourage the launch of an internship program with SSM Health's medical facilities there.



*Abdoulahi Bah, SSM Health Maintenance Team Intern assisted with projects involving the hospital pneumatic tube system.*

In Monroe, SSM Health sparked an interest in health care careers with middle school students through the in-person resumption of Club Scrub, a 10-week hands-on program that gives students from area schools a chance to meet and work with providers across various SSM Health Monroe Hospital departments, including: the Cath Lab, Emergency Services, Family Medicine, Orthopedics, Pharmacy, Rehabilitation Services and Surgical Services.

## Pathways Programs/Jeff Levy Education Center

### UnityPoint Health-Meriter

The UnityPoint Health – Meriter Jeff Levy Education Center officially opened in Spring 2023 to house a nursing education program, and community health education classes.



*The inaugural cohort for the UW Health RN Apprenticeship Program*

All the programs are designed to diversify the state’s health care workforce. We work to develop future generations of health care professionals from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and lived experiences, thus building a workforce that is best equipped to advocate for all patients and address health inequities. Through partnerships with the Black Men’s Coalition, Urban League and local nursing schools we’re able to provide training and career advancement in Environmental Services, Phlebotomy, Certified Nursing Assistant and Medical Assistant roles.

The education center will also aid in accelerating new team members to the patient bedside. The center houses Meriter’s new team member onboarding process, including orientation, badging and Employee Health Services in one location, to streamline the onboarding process and get newly hired or licensed caregivers on the floor faster.

By increasing access to health care education and training we will boost the number of individuals pursuing—and advancing in—the field of health care. Workforce sustainability is crucial to positive patient outcomes. We will advance and cultivate our own, ensuring every patient is treated by skilled, tenured caregivers. Through the Jeff Levy Education Center, we will work to provide health care career and advancement opportunities to entry-level employees through Pathways Program enrollment (strongly encouraged for team members from historically marginalized communities) and scholarships; Improve advancement and leadership opportunities within nursing, particularly among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) team members, through scholarships, loan forgiveness, paid support for advanced nursing certification through preparatory courses and more.

## Growing the Nursing Workforce at UW Health

### UW Health, Madison

UW Health continues to be challenged by a nationwide nursing shortage. Taking a proactive stance, UW Health has created a new RN Apprenticeship Program, designed to grow and diversify the nursing workforce at UW Health while creating new pathways for career advancement and professional growth.

This innovative program creates pathways to employment, training and advancement to join the nursing profession. Local community partnerships, educational support and a focus on diversity are all part of this effort to grow our nursing workforce.

“This Nurse Apprenticeship Program offers a comprehensive growth pathway like nothing we have ever seen before,” said Anne Mork, MS, MHCDS, RN, chief nursing officer, ambulatory and nursing support services. “We are excited to open the doors to employees who have wanted to pursue a career in nursing but could not afford it or take the necessary time away from work for their schooling. This Nurse Apprenticeship Program lets them work while they learn, covering all education expenses. It helps foster a culture of learning, support and professional growth by offering wrap-around support as necessary.”

The RN Apprenticeship Program offers formal classroom learning at Madison College and laboratory skills and on the job training at UW Health. In addition, apprentices have access to:

- Academic support services at UW Health and Madison College
- Comprehensive education and career pathway support from Madison College
- A range of other wrap around support services through the UW Health Allied Health Education and Career Pathways, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs
- Additional funding support for wrap around support services through the Department of Workforce Development of South-Central Wisconsin

“I feel very lucky and honored to work for an organization that prioritizes growth and provides a lot of opportunities for you to grow,” stated Autumn Irby, one of the RN apprentices.

## Health Equity

### Focusing on Inclusivity and Health Equity

#### Grant Regional Health Center, Lancaster

Grant Regional Health Center is committed to ensuring that all individuals have access to high quality health care and equal opportunities for a lifetime of good health. In 2022 we began preparations to welcome a new bilingual Family Medicine/Obstetrics provider Dr. David Casillas Plazola to our medical staff. Prior to Dr. Casillas starting in September 2022, Grant Regional focused internal efforts to become a more welcoming organization specifically to Spanish speaking patients and guests including adding wayfinding signage in Spanish, offering Spanish in the Workplace classes, improvements in translation services, and document translation.



*Ensuring access to high quality care in our community.*

In addition to the hospital's internal initiative to be more inclusivity and welcoming to Spanish speaking population, a community grassroots effort began with the goal to strengthen our local workforce and highlight the important benefits of improving our community's inclusivity and diversity efforts.

The idea of 'Growing Lancaster' evolved from conversations between leaders at Amcor and Grant Regional Health Center when discussing workforce shortages and hiring issues. Further conversations led to forming a committee and inviting people interested in sparking change with the suggestion that if Lancaster businesses focused on welcoming diversity to their workforce that could increase staffing and, in turn, benefit the local economy and stimulate community growth.

Since the group organized, they have planned and held monthly meetings; added interested members; developed a name, mission statement and informational flyer; presented at City Council to communicate and educate the council

members on goals and plans of the group; connected with Madison Latino Chamber of Commerce; hosted Night on the Square in July to introduce Latin culture; investigated funding opportunities and researched other communities such as Darlington to learn from their success, hosted a focus group with immigrant workers at a local dairy farm and have since responded to their input with offering ELL classes in Lancaster.

For more information or to view our Welcoming Week video, visit [www.lancasterwichamber.com/growing-lancaster](http://www.lancasterwichamber.com/growing-lancaster).

### Community Health Worker Program Brings Value to Schools

#### Marshfield Medical Center, Beaver Dam

Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam launched a partnership with Horicon School District to staff a Community Health Worker (CHW) within the district to support K-12 students and their families.

Through community care coordination, the CHW connects students and their families to behavioral, social and physical health resources and supports as they navigate mental health care and social service systems. The program strives to increase student success and improve overall student wellbeing. During the first six months of the program, 28 students were able to access mental health services, and over 40 families. Through outreach activities, the CHW has connected with over 600 students with activities like health screenings and mental health bingo.

### Delivering a Healthy Future: Sauk Prairie Area Food Pantry

#### Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac

Sauk Prairie Healthcare knows that access to nutritious food is essential to health and wellbeing. In 2022, Sauk Prairie Healthcare Foundation partnered with the Sauk Prairie Food Pantry on the Go Fresh project to deliver fresh produce to students in the school district. The project was an overwhelming success.



*Sauk Prairie Food Pantry delivery van*

With the help of a \$10,000 grant from Sauk Prairie Healthcare Foundation, the pantry purchased a van to deliver food to those who cannot travel to the pantry.

Dr. Janelle Hupp, Chair of the Sauk Prairie Healthcare Foundation Grants and Gifts Committee, said “The Foundation’s mission is to meet the needs of the communities we serve. There is no need as essential as food. The Sauk Prairie Food Pantry has a proven track record of innovating and meeting this need for a variety of populations. We were pleased to be able to make the purchase of this van possible.”

## Hospital Partners with Access Community Health Centers to Support Vulnerable Populations

### SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital – Madison

Improving health equity in the communities we serve is a priority for SSM Health. As one way of addressing health equity for patients from marginalized backgrounds, SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Madison partners with Access Community Health Centers, the only federally recognized community health center in Dane County. Access works to provide high-quality and culturally competent health care services to the under-insured and uninsured people at five clinic locations in Madison, Sun Prairie and Dodgeville, with the support of community partners like SSM Health. Access currently sees more than 33,000 patients per year.

For more than two decades, SSM Health has supported Access through an imaging voucher program. Through this program, uninsured Access patients are provided with a voucher to take to St. Mary’s Hospital to receive diagnostic testing for certain chronic diseases. The partnership eventually made way for initiatives to assist other vulnerable populations, such as SSM Health’s sponsorship of Access’ Prenatal Program. Through this program, Access provided comprehensive care to 591 birthing persons and babies in 2022, an increase of 7% from the previous year. Family practice physicians and certified nurse midwives provide prenatal, delivery and postpartum services, with additional support from prenatal nurses, lactation consultants and patient service representatives.

Patient service representatives are the first point of contact for prenatal patients and are a lifeline throughout their pregnancy. They ensure patients are able to schedule and attend appointments and help them to access medical, social and community resources such as food pantries and clothing and baby supplies, as well as prenatal care coordination through Public Health. They provide ongoing support for months or even years following delivery. In 2022, the Access Patient Services team worked with 841 prenatal and postpartum patients.

## SSM Health Puts Focus on Latino Communities to Improve Access and Health Equity

### SSM Health Wisconsin Region, Madison

SSM Health Wisconsin embarked on several new initiatives to improve health equity for members of our Latino communities. The community health specialist at SSM Health Monroe Hospital collaborated with public health teams from Green and Stephenson Counties to survey area Latinos in Spanish about their most pressing health needs to determine where to start in advocating for an increase in the most needed services.



*Local community members discuss ways to improve access and health equality for members of the Latino population in Green County.*

The survey team decided participants might be more receptive to discussing their needs in their own language in familiar surroundings. To encourage people to participate in the survey, the team arranged a mini fiesta at an area grocery store complete with music and free food. Initial survey results indicate the health care priorities for this community include: improving access to physicals, diabetes education and dental and eye exams.

At SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital – Janesville, the community health specialist is leading educational sessions for members of the area’s Latino community to help them learn how to navigate the online MyChart resources and set up medical appointments. The hospital also helped to fund a new Latin Business Council and presented a grant to Stateline Literacy to provide digital literacy education for community members participating in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

SSM Health also teamed with the Jacob’s SWAG (Support With Awareness & Giving) Foundation to now offer a Spanish language version of the free, digital mental health application, “Got Your Back,” available nationwide on Apple and Google Play stores. The app features custom-built tools to help users cope with anxiety and depression and was developed by SSM Health in partnership with the foundation.

## Gloria Jones-Bey Certified Nursing Assistant Pathways Program

### UnityPoint Health-Meriter, Madison

The Gloria Jones-Bey Certified Nursing Assistant Pathways Program was launched in 2020 to meet the needs of our community's increasingly diverse patient population. It is rooted in the belief that every day, hundreds of people from a diverse range of backgrounds and lives experiences enter UnityPoint Health-Meriter hospital and clinics looking for help and quality care from our medical professionals, and no matter who walks through our doors, there should be someone on staff who can identify with them, communicate with them and best serve their individual needs.

It is vital our community sees themselves reflected within our health care workforce, and the Gloria Jones-Bey Program works to address that by offering current UnityPoint Health-Meriter team members and community members from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities the unique opportunity to train to become a CNA.

The training program, in partnership with the Center for Healthcare Education and Simulation, includes direct patient care and processes and procedures to assist in supporting a broad range of health care services to our patients. All instruction is provided on paid time.

The program was named in honor of the late Gloria Jones-Bey, a former vice president at Meriter Hospital and respected African American nursing professional in the Madison community.

## Addressing Equity through Charitable Giving

### UW Health, Madison

As part of its commitment to dismantle racism, UW Health adopted a partner-centered philosophy of giving that employs equity and anti-racism principles, including nonbureaucratic decision-making, transparent communication and shifting power to those with lived experience. It removes unnecessary barriers to funding and centers voices of color while allowing UW Health to remain highly engaged with the work, outcomes and challenges of community partners.

UW Health prioritizes partnering with organizations led by people of color that address the organization's community health improvement and diversity, equity and inclusion priorities. They focus on building authentic relationships to gain firsthand knowledge of the work and needs in the community.

In FY22, UW Health partnered with 245 local non-profit organizations and contributed \$6.5m in cash and in-kind contributions to the community. Seventy-two percent of

their cash contributions went to organizations led by people of color. One partnership example is the YWCA of Madison, which is widely recognized as a community leader for its work to eliminate racism and empower women. The organization takes a holistic approach to helping people by addressing the root causes of poverty such as homelessness, unemployment/underemployment and racism. CEO Vanessa McDowell said of UW Health's annual contribution, "I can't tell you how much it meant to my staff and me that UW Health heard our challenges and trusted us to have the best solutions to combat these challenges."

By supporting organizations led by people of color, UW Health is living its mission to dismantle racism and is effectively addressing health equity in its community.

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### HungerCare Wellness Program Collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank and UW-Extension

#### Gundersen Boscobel Area Hospital and Clinic, Boscobel

Gundersen Boscobel Area Hospital and Clinic's Community Health Needs Assessment indicated food insecurity and the delay of preventive health were putting our communities at risk.



GBAHC Community Wellness Coordinator Cameron Novy and SWCAP Pantry Coordinator Rhonda Christensen distribute HungerCare food boxes to enrollees.

While exploring ways to impact these identified health needs, we learned about the opportunity to partner with Second Harvest Foodbank to bring the HungerCare Wellness Program to Boscobel. The 12-month program is designed to support patients with diabetes, heart disease, or food insecurity. Once a month, enrollees receive a complimentary food box that includes nearly 30 pounds of diabetic-friendly and heart-healthy fresh, frozen, and dry goods along with educational

handouts and meal-kit style recipe cards that correlate with the items received.

The collaborative effort began in October 2022 when Gundersen Boscobel agreed to coordinate enrollment, monthly reminders, and staff monthly pick-ups, Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program's (SWCAP) Northern Grant County Food Pantry agreed to be the distribution site, and Second Harvest Foodbank agreed to provide the monthly food boxes and educational materials. Since its launch, the engagement from primary care providers, cardiopulmonary rehab nurses, and others at Gundersen Boscobel Area Hospital and Clinics has resulted in 36 patients being referred to and enrolled in the wellness program.

To further complement the HungerCare Program and support the health and well-being of program enrollees, UW-Extension's FoodWise Nutrition Educator Kathy Lange was added to the partnership. Now, each month before pick-up, enrollees can attend a one-hour "Cooking with Kathy" class at the hospital. Each session offers enrollees a sneak peek of their box contents, nutrition education, an interactive cooking demonstration, and taste testing. Program participants have raved about Kathy's approach and the opportunity to learn practical ways of using ingredients to support a healthier lifestyle.

## Mental Health Support When You Need It

### Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac

Mental health was identified as one of the top priorities in the 2022-24 Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by Sauk Prairie Healthcare.

In 2022, we collaborated with local partners on various mental health initiatives, including those focused on mental health awareness in the agricultural community, mental health first aid, and the development of a behavioral health program.

- We support the Farmer Angel Network, an organization that works to prevent suicide in agricultural communities through awareness, education, collaboration, and improved access to mental health care. Through conversations, the network strives to bring the community – especially farmers and their families – together to reduce the stigma of mental health. Sauk Prairie Healthcare has an employee actively involved with the network.
- Mental Health First Aid is a program designed to teach participants how to spot the signs of mental illness, as well as how to respond when identified. It also provides the tools and resources to assist those who need mental health support. All classes are fully

funded with a grant from the Sauk Prairie Healthcare Foundation and are free of charge to those who participate. In 2022, Sauk Prairie Healthcare held six Mental Health First Aid classes.

- We are integrating behavioral health services into primary care to give patients quick access to mental health services. This effort includes coordination between primary care providers, case managers or behavioral health consultants, and mental health specialists (e.g., psychiatrists).

## SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Janesville Supports Healing Through Art Therapy Program

### SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital, Janesville

God is Faithful Temporary Shelter (GIFTS), a faith-based organization which provides housing and resources to men experiencing homelessness in Janesville, is excited to partner with SSM Health.

After earning an SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville Mini Grant in 2022, GIFTS launched "Heal.Create.Explore." The art therapy program helps GIFTS residents to express themselves and promote positive mental health outcomes.



*Representatives from SSM Health and GIFTS attend the bench dedication.*

Further opportunities to expand the art therapy program began taking place in 2023, with the introduction of a woodworking class.

In July, GIFTS representatives visited SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville to thank the health ministry for its support, and to present a beautiful bench made by art therapy students.

"Our goal with art therapy is to provide a path of self-discovery and healing while the men at GIFTS await mental health care. Sometimes the obstacles of insurance and finding a mental health professional can take up to eight weeks," said

GIFTS Executive Director MaryAnn Raash. “We are so blessed that SSM Health stepped up to help us fill that time gap with a grant for an art therapy program. Our men now have a way to express themselves, their feelings, and begin to process painful experiences through ink, paint, clay, and other media.”

In addition to dedicating the bench, GIFTS made an exciting announcement: the organization’s first art therapy showcase will soon take place.

“Mental health is a huge component of overall wellbeing,” said SSM Health Community Health Director Megan Timm. “The GIFTS art therapy program is making such a positive impact in the community, and we are excited to see how it transforms in the future.”

## Building New Solutions to Community Housing Challenges

### SSM Health Monroe Hospital, Monroe

Community collaborators have come together to address Green County’s housing challenges as one of the identified health priorities from the Community Health Needs Assessment. SSM Health Monroe Hospital is contributing with three different housing initiatives with various community partners in 2023.



SSM Health Monroe Hosp. leaders present check to the Men’s Resource Ctr.

SSM Health Monroe Hospital donated \$10,000 to Men’s Resource Center of Green County who operate the men’s homeless shelter in Monroe. The donation is helping support the center’s current five-bed facility with the funds to make updates and add more bedrooms and bathrooms. In 2022, the Men’s Resource Center turned away around 50 men due to being at capacity.

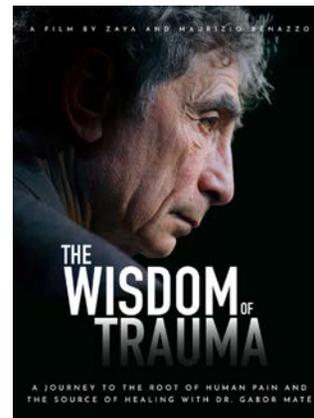
Currently, SSM Health Monroe Hospital owns various properties in the neighborhood surrounding the hospital, one of which has been donated to the Green County Development Corporation (GCDC). GCDC has now taken the house and is utilizing trades programs at Monroe High School and Blackhawk Technical College to rehab the house before it is sold to fund the purchase of the next home. This project not only provides a renovated home in a tight market but also offers a learning opportunity for students.

A plot of bare land has also been donated to Habitat for Humanity of Green County for the purpose of building a home on it. The proximity of this lot to the hospital will allow the occupants to have close access to health care and starts the project off with a blank slate. This donation will also present opportunities for further community collaboration through the building process.

This work being done in Green County to impact the housing need is just the beginning. Together, SSM Health Monroe Hospital and community partners are continuing to have meaningful conversations about what the community needs and taking actionable steps to move these efforts forward.

## SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo Hosts Dr. Gabor Mate’s “The Wisdom of Trauma” Film Screenings

### SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo



Film poster from *The Wisdom of Trauma* screenings hosted by SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo

SSM Health, in partnership with the UW Platteville – Baraboo, Sauk County Public Health and the House of Wellness hosted two free community screenings of the Dr. Gabor Mate film, *The Wisdom of Trauma* in April of 2023.

The idea for the screenings was brought forth by SSM Health Addiction Medicine and Family Medicine provider, Dr. Cheryl R. Goeckermann and grew into a community mental

health partnership with the help of SSM Health Community Health Manager for Baraboo, Nikeya Bramlett.

Dr. Goeckermann shared, “I work exclusively with patients with substance use disorders, and they have all experienced some degree of trauma. I find there is a lack of understanding about this—in the clinic, in the community and in the patients themselves. I’m excited to share Dr. Mate’s film with the community to educate and increase awareness about trauma and its effects on people and their lives.”

The film provides a journey with a man who has dedicated his life to understanding the connection between illness, addiction, trauma, and society. It has been seen by over six million people from 230 countries and was attended by over 100 people in the Baraboo area, who were also provided mental health support at the screenings. The success of the Baraboo initiative has spurred conversations in other SSM Health markets to consider hosting screenings in their communities as well.

## Helping Those Living with Parkinson's Disease

### Stoughton Health, Stoughton

Parkinson's Disease is on the rise and second only to Alzheimer's Disease in neurodegenerative disorders. While research is ongoing to find a cure, evidence shows exercise can help those living with Parkinson's relieve symptoms and maintain quality of life.



*The Wisconsin Parkinson's Association contributes to Stoughton Health's program.*

Stoughton Health is proud to offer Parkinson's Disease exercise classes led by trained physical therapist Emily Devine, DPT. Emily is considered one of our local experts as she is certified in LSVT BIG and LOUD (Lee Silverman Voice Treatment) and presents to future DPT's in the Doctoral Physical Therapy program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Through her passion and mentorship, Stoughton Health has been able to expand program offerings from one class per week to three classes per week at two different locations (Stoughton and Oregon) and we have grown from one certified employee to four who can provide LSVT Big and Loud services to our patients and community. In addition, through Emily's championship, the Wisconsin Parkinson's Association awarded Stoughton Health a grant to invest in equipment for these Parkinson's classes to increase challenge, provide a variety of movement options, and improve the quality of exercises for those who participate. Emily advocates for those living with Parkinson's Disease through her volunteerism as well. Every year she fundraises and participates in the Optimism Walks held locally through the American Parkinson Disease Association.

Emily's passion for her mission is evident in feedback from her group. Long-time class participant Ruby Cabibbo shares, "Emily's genuine interest in the whole person is obvious in every class. She shows her vast knowledge of Parkinson's disease to help class members incorporate exercise into their lives. Emily is very skilled at individualizing the exercise within the group setting and uses many techniques to help each class member progress. She challenges us and makes it a fun session."

## Safe Communities/Recovery Coaches on Site

### UnityPoint Health-Meriter, Madison

UnityPoint Health-Meriter and Safe Communities partnered this year to pilot an onsite, enhanced Recovery Coach program in an effort to support those who have experiences and overdose emergency or struggle with addiction.

The on-site program is staffed with recovery coaches and peer support specialists. Recovery coaches are individuals with lived experience that are professionally trained to be long-term allies to individuals wanting to change their mental health or substance use.

For patients interested in receiving support, Safe Communities coaches will work with patients, families and hospital staff to reduce the harm of their substance use and assist in recovery. The program will be open and available during the busiest hours of the emergency department, which are determined based on drug overdose treatment data.

Meriter and Safe Communities also partner to provide community-based fentanyl-reduction kits. Through this work, over 100 free and lifesaving doses of naloxone are available in and around Dane County.

## Supporting Black Mothers and Babies Through ConnectRx Wisconsin

### UW Health, Madison

ConnectRx is a communitywide care coordination approach launched in 2022 that connects Black pregnant patients to community resources during pregnancy and for up to a year after birth, with an ultimate goal to improve birth outcomes.

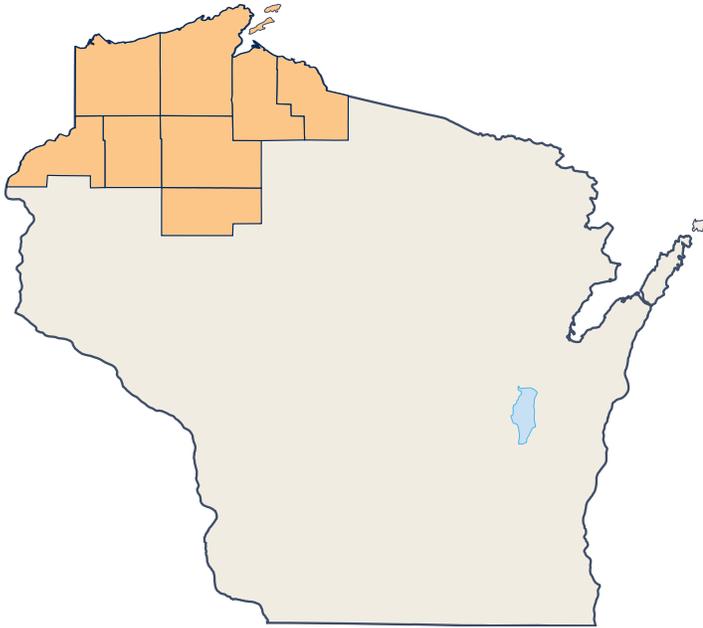
The UW Health Population Health Department implemented ConnectRx Wisconsin in partnership with the Dane County Health Council and the Black Maternal and Child Health Alliance. ConnectRx works to reduce disparities in birthweight and infant mortality and support reproductive justice—one of four health priorities based on the most recent Dane County CHNA.

In the program's first year, UW Health hired seven community health workers (CHWs) who support eligible pregnant patients to provide culturally responsive care and assist with navigating community resources. CHWs advocate for patients with landlords, community-based organizations and medical providers. They procure and deliver food, diapers and other essential items to patients. The team also writes letters of support and refers patients to additional resources as needed.

Key accomplishments in the first year include:

- 13 Black pregnant patients screened;
- 194 patients enrolled; and
- 75 healthy babies born to enrolled patients.

# Vikingland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$32,255,759**

## *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

### **Unique Apprenticeship Program Helps Essentia Health Prepare Clinical Assistants**

**Essentia Health, Hayward**



*Samantha Jensen was the first apprentice to successfully complete the program and pass the certification exam.*

Wisconsin, like many other states, is facing significant health care workforce challenges. The uneven distribution of workers, with rural and underserved areas often experiencing the most acute shortages, highlights the need for targeted strategies to ensure access to care. Seeking a creative solution to workforce challenges, Essentia Health unveiled a clinical assistant apprenticeship program.

The apprenticeship program provides on-the-job training with a mentor, all while

receiving a paycheck. No medical background is required to participate, and the yearlong training is typically completed at the clinic. After training is complete, apprentices are qualified to take their board exam.

The clinical assistant apprenticeship program has been wildly successful at the Essentia Health–Hayward Clinic. Most students do not have any health care experience but are eager to learn and are working independently within weeks. Students start with easier tasks such as taking a patient’s height and weight, but progress to doing blood pressure and other vitals at their own pace.

Samantha Jensen was the first apprentice to complete the program and pass the exam and is now a clinical assistant at the Essentia Health–Hayward Clinic. The combination of virtual education and hands-on training prepared Jensen for this next step in her career. Jensen also appreciated that the yearlong program was structured “for me to still be able to be a mom and work.”

“Developing our workforce through an apprentice program allows us to invest in our employees and enhance health care in the communities we’re so privileged to serve,” said Beth Young, director of nursing, ambulatory and transitions in care for Essentia’s East Market. “This program is exciting not only because it’s an innovative approach to strengthening our workforce, but also because it allows us to create something unique and give people opportunities that may not have otherwise been available to them.”

## *Hospital-supported Initiatives*

### **Burnett Medical Center Addresses Top Health Need from Community Health Needs Assessment**

**Burnett Medical Center, Grantsburg**

The 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment identified alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) to be Burnett County’s most significant health need. Burnett Medical Center (BMC) is addressing it by partnering with local law enforcement and by implementing a vape disposal box.

Every April and October, BMC participates in Wisconsin’s Prescription Drug Take Back Initiative with local law enforcement. The goal is to provide a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposal of prescription medications, while also educating the public about the potential for abuse of these medications. Unused prescription medications in homes create a public health and safety concern because they can be accidentally ingested, stolen, misused, and abused. According to the most recent Burnett County Youth Risk

Behavior Survey data, 29.2% of middle school students use prescription drugs without a prescription.



Collecting prescriptions from the community for Prescription Drug Take Back Day

BMC will also be implementing a vape disposal kit for our local community to utilize. The kit will contain a locked drop box for vapes to be placed in, gloves for proper handling when emptying, plastic zip lock bags for placement in lock box, quit resources for youth and adults, a biohazard bag, and a prepaid shipping box to send the vapes in for proper disposal. Tobacco uses such as cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is decreasing among adults and high school youth. However, E-Cigarettes with high school youth is becoming a concern in Burnett County. According to the Wisconsin Youth Tobacco Survey, in 2020, the percentage of high school youth using E-Cigarettes is 21% which is significantly higher than 1.9% in 2012.

By working to address this health need, BMC is helping to alleviate this statewide challenge. BMC's hope is to be a resource for the community and ultimately make the community a healthier place to live.

## Community Health Funding Program

### Marshfield Medical Center-Ladysmith

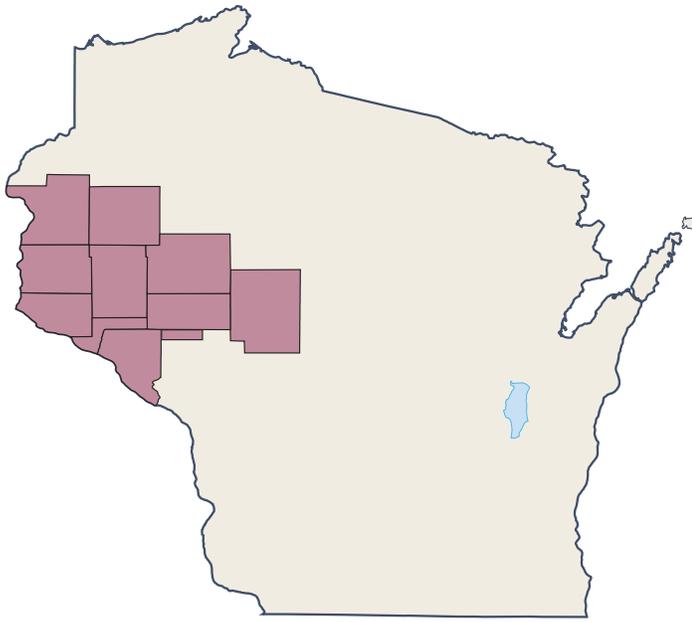
Marshfield Medical Center-Ladysmith launched a Community Health Funding Program. Funding provides support to local community-based organizations to enhance or implement programs or services that will improve the overall health and well-being of communities served by Marshfield Medical Center-Ladysmith.

This was the first time this Community Health Funding Program was offered, and organizations across Chippewa, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties were eligible to apply. Initiatives received funds to increase local services for

multiple youth programs, enhance ongoing local community and school-based projects, support new or existing projects, and aim to improve the availability of programs, activities and services to community members.

Putting resources into community programming that helps people make good decisions, enables positive choices and supporting connections that empower healthy behaviors is a key goal of this funding. Within our mission, vision and values we support our communities and our residents in many ways so they can participate in and improve their lives the best they can.

# West Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$75,987,943**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Providing Health Care to Those in Need

#### Mayo Clinic Health System, La Crosse and Sparta

In 2022 Mayo Clinic Health System in Southwest Wisconsin continued to participate in a unique collaboration to provide free medical care to uninsured residents of the region. Two nonprofit organizations, operating as St. Clare Health Mission, operate free walk-in clinics utilizing dedicated space on the Mayo campuses in La Crosse and Sparta. The program in La Crosse now also offers a mobile medical clinic, which launched in August of 2022 and experienced 278 patient visits during the year.



Mayo Clinic Health System leaders with Jason Larsen, Executive Director of the St. Clare Health Mission in La Crosse.

The Health Mission model utilizes unpaid volunteers including physicians, nurses, social workers, lab technicians and pharmacists, who provide care to qualifying patients at no charge. Mayo supports the Health Mission services in collaboration with other organizations including Gundersen Health System. Both medical facilities provide volunteers and serve on the boards of the Health Missions, and both accept referrals to extend free care to those requiring services beyond what the Health Missions can provide.

In 2022, the Sparta-based program experienced 154 patient visits. The La Crosse-based program experienced 1,318 clinic visits.

## Health Equity

### Western Wisconsin Health Expands Birth Center Unit

#### Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin



The expansion team at Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin.

Western Wisconsin Health (WWH) in Baldwin, Wisconsin serves patients in rural St. Croix, Pierce, and Dunn Counties. Due to reimbursement rates, the closure of many birth centers in our rural communities, including neighboring cities of River Falls and Menomonie, many patients must travel from further distances outside of our established service area to seek obstetrical services and maternal health care here at WWH. WWH wants to provide for these patients to keep them close to home, therefore WWH decided to not only keep our birth center open but to grow our services, despite low reimbursement rates. To address this barrier to access and capacity, WWH broke ground in September of 2023 for a hospital expansion, which will add four rooms to the medical-surgical wing and three rooms to the birth center wing.

WWH recognizes the need to grow for our patients and has seen a steady increase in deliveries over the last five years. In 2017 WWH delivered 170 babies and in 2021 delivered 225 babies, which is a 25% increase. WWH has already seen a 10% increase in births and anticipates 275 births by the end of 2023.

The community benefit regarding obstetrical services is shown through WWH growing hospital units for our rural population. The WWH foundation has been awarded and continues to seek grant funding not only to support the bricks and mortar portion of our expansion but to also support our obstetrical programming and workforce needs. The WWH team provides perinatal services, women's health needs, behavioral health, and obstetrical care all at our Baldwin location but also has begun obstetrical services to some of the communities that no longer have a birth center such as River Falls. We are redefining rural health care for our families, mothers, and babies to achieve our mission of Building a Healthier Tomorrow together.

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### Community Partnership Projects Leverage Outdoors to Improve Health

#### Aspirus Stanley Hospital and Clinics, Stanley

Aspirus Stanley Hospital and Clinics is using one of Wisconsin's greatest assets to fuel opportunities to improve health and wellness.



*A Trailside Bike Sign Project was installed at Chapman Park in Stanley*

Wisconsin's outdoors offers prime opportunities to walk, bike, swim or take part in any number of different activities.

With support from Aspirus Stanley Hospital, The Stanley Lions Club spearheaded the development of a Community Bike Trail aimed at improving access and safety for bicyclists. The 2.2-mile trail connects Chapman and Oriole Parks in Stanley with a 10-foot-wide path.

Chapman Park was also selected as a location for a Trailside Sign project in partnership with the Wisconsin Bike Federation, Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Aspirus Health. The set of nine trailside signs with QR codes allow families and community groups to watch short videos, access downloadable slides, and then practice skills at their own pace or on their own schedule. This educational opportunity aims to help riders at any level learn skills and tips to keep everyone safe. The signs even have bike-friendly driver tips to create a better sense of community with everyone sharing the road respectfully.

"These projects complimented each other as a unified theme to encourage safe and healthy activities in our community," said Deenah King, Community Health Improvement Lead, Aspirus Stanley Hospital.

In the nearby Granton School District, a \$4,000 grant in partnership with the Clark County Eat Right Be Fit Coalition provided the necessary funding for a "story walk."

The project plan called for the seasonal use of three different books to be broken up into sections with each placed on a sign and stationed at points along the trail at the Granton School Forest. All the books carry environmental themes to educate people taking a walk down the trail.

"This is something the entire community can use to be active and learn about the environment," added King.

### Maternity Onto Motherhood Program

#### HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital, Eau Claire

Preparing to welcome your new bundle of joy is exciting, but it can also be overwhelming. HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital's Maternity Onto Motherhood (MOM) Program aims to help parents with trusted resources, support and service -- close to home.

Established in 2020, the MOM Program offers prenatal, childbirth and breastfeeding education classes, tours of the birthing suites and lactation consultation. Whether a participant is welcoming their first baby or has given birth before, they learn about the birthing process and available delivery options. A coordinator meets with expectant families to identify needs and concerns, as well as make service referrals as needed. They learn about gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and other maternity complications to gain a better understanding of the conditions.

The classes, like all aspects of the MOM program, are free.

The Women and Infants Center staff have helped hundreds of local families prepare to welcome their new addition. The

MOM Program was launched in conjunction with the start of a breast milk depot and dispensary, which is a partnership between HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital and Mother's Milk Bank of the Western Great Lakes.

## Monday Market at the Y

### HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital, Chippewa Falls

When the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment for Chippewa County identified Chronic Disease Prevention as a top priority, the Chippewa Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) doubled down on its efforts to improve access to healthy foods within the Chippewa Falls community. As the longtime CHIP administrator, HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital worked closely this past year with the Chippewa Falls YMCA and CHIP Chronic Disease Prevention Action Team to establish Monday Market at the Y—a brand new farmers market that allows FoodShare participants to use their benefits to purchase fresh, nutritious, locally grown foods.

The new market began operation in June and takes place from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Monday (other than holidays) through the end of September. In addition to facilitating electronic benefits transfer (EBT) transactions, the Monday Market provides FoodShare participants with up to \$10 per week in "Market Match" tokens to help address food security. Vendors also accept WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers.

In addition, CHIP agencies have used the Monday Market as an opportunity to share education and resources on a wide range of health topics, such as nutrition, mental health, vaping and dementia. The YMCA even hosted a "Let's Talk About Preventing Diabetes" presentation from Wisconsin Health Literacy during one week—with attendees receiving \$10 in tokens to shop at the market afterward.

"The mission of our coalition is to provide everyone with the information, resources, and support they need to be their healthiest selves, and the Monday Market aligns perfect with that purpose," said CHIP Coordinator Melissa Ives, who works as a Community Health Outreach Specialist for HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls. "It feels great to get this off the ground after years of exploring our options, and we could not have found a better community partner than the YMCA to move this initiative forward.

## School Collaboration on Suicide Prevention

### Marshfield Medical Center-Eau Claire

Marshfield Medical Center-Eau Claire collaborated with the Eau Claire Area School District to provide a community

awareness event focused on suicide prevention and resiliency. Over 60 community members attended and participated in the viewing of the documentary "The Ripple Effect," which highlights the story of Kevin Hines, who attempted to take his life by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge and survived. He has dedicated his life to raising awareness around the importance of mental health. Additionally, 12 community organizations, coalitions and not-for-profits hosted a resource fair.

## Event Aims to Change the Conversation Around Alcohol

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Eau Claire

Mayo Clinic Health System and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire hosted a free community education event, "Changing the conversation around alcohol in the U.S.: Acknowledging the elephant in the room." The keynote speaker was George Koob, Ph.D., an internationally recognized expert on alcohol and stress and the neurobiology of alcohol and drug addiction. He is the Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and a senior investigator at the Intramural Research Program of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Dr. Koob's presentation addressed alcohol consumption and alcohol use disorder, including raising awareness about the scope of the problem and shedding light on the social and health consequences of alcohol misuse. Over 300 community members attended the evening event.



*Dr. George Koob presents at Schofield Auditorium on UW-Eau Claire campus*

Dr. Koob also presented a medical grand rounds presentation, "Alcohol Use Disorder and Allostasis: The Gain in the Brain is in the Emotional Pain," at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire. This presentation was open to all healthcare providers and other professionals within the community interested in learning more about alcohol use disorder and addiction.

Ranked as three of the top five health priorities needing improvement in the 2021 Eau Claire County Community Health Needs Assessment, mental health, drug use and alcohol misuse remain major concerns for Eau Claire County residents. Studies show that many factors that have the greatest influence on health occur in our community. The foundations for success and improvement lie within the important partnerships with community-based organizations and residents. Mayo Clinic Health System recognizes that these partnerships provide an excellent opportunity to translate everyone's vision for healthier communities into visible, concrete changes and, ultimately, a healthier place to live.

## Stop the Bleed

### Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville

Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville Emergency Department Supervisor Chris Keller was awarded the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) Rural Ambassador award for his work with Stop the Bleed and other various injury prevention initiatives. Marshfield provided Stop the Bleed and injury prevention booths at career fairs, company appreciation days and business-to-business events.

In addition, through Keller's leadership we partnered with the Clark County Health Department to provide free Stop the Bleed tourniquet training to local businesses. Noticing a fair number of injuries coming from an area sawmill in Plain, he reached out to offer Stop the Bleed training. Sawmill employees came to Neillsville to receive Stop the Bleed training and were given a free Stop the Bleed kit to keep onsite.

Stop the Bleed training helps to save lives by training people how to stop traumatic bleeding until experienced emergency personnel arrive on the scene to assist.

## Recovery Coach Program Expands

### Marshfield Medical Center-Rice Lake

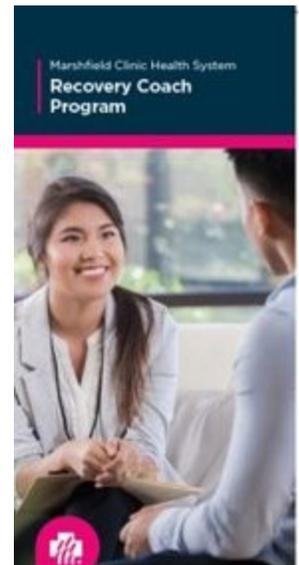
After a successful pilot at Marshfield Medical Center (MMC)-Ladysmith in 2021, Marshfield Clinic Health System expanded their Recovery Coach primary care and hospital-based model to include MMC-Rice Lake, MMC-Beaver Dam, and MMC-Weston including Wausau Center and Chippewa Center locations.

Rural health care facilities continue to be a ripe place for recovery coach service integration. Marshfield Clinic recognizes the need to address all aspects of a patient's health, and this includes substance use.

One anonymous provider reported, "This is a much-needed service in the area. I am proud to work for an organization who supports offering this service for those who need it."

Recovery coaches are a part of Marshfield Clinic's AmeriCorps Recovery Corps program and are trained in a 36-hour Recovery Coach Academy to become Certified Recovery Coaches. Recovery coaches support patient and community members affected by substance use by serving as a resource navigator, sober companion, motivator, and lived-experience partner. Marshfield Clinic offers service free of charge to not only patients but community members as well.

In 2022, Recovery Coaches helped 153 people. Of those who enrolled in the program, 98% reported that the program helped them maintain sobriety. In addition, 57% of participants made progress toward at least one of their identified wellness goals. Marshfield Clinic plans to expand to four additional locations in 2023.



## Library Collaboration Aims to Benefit All Ages

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Chippewa Valley in Bloomer

Mayo Clinic Health System (MCHS) understands the importance of public libraries in our rural communities. Not only do they provide free and equal access to books and information, but they are often a safe place for children during the summer months and weekdays after school, providing homework help, games, book clubs and oftentimes, snacks for children. They serve as a gathering space for business meetings, parent groups and fitness classes and provide access to high-speed internet connections –this sometimes being the only option for people without.

Mayo Clinic Health System – Chippewa Valley in Bloomer collaborated with the GE Bleskacek Family Memorial Bloomer Public Library to offer free classes for youth and seniors and sponsor healthy snacks for all the library youth programs.

Maria Seibel, Community Engagement Specialist with Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin, facilitates the library's "Fun with Food" and "Strong Bodies" classes.

Fun with Food is an after-school event for elementary-age children. Every week, children are invited for an hour after school to enjoy a healthy snack and learn about important health topics, such as staying active, limiting your screen time, and keeping your lungs healthy. Maria also facilitates Strong Bodies – Basic Fitness Class twice weekly at the Bloomer Senior Center. Strong Bodies is a fitness class geared toward those 50 and older, it is an eight-week class that has been shown to increase strength, muscle mass and bone density. Both classes have received positive feedback and continue to garner active participation from library patrons.



Children participating in a class at the Bloomer Public Library

Mayo Clinic Health System values its collaborative efforts with other nonprofit organizations and government agencies, such as public libraries, to address community needs. Collaboration allows community partners to maximize resources and achieve better outcomes to create an environment that promotes health and well-being for all.

## Supporting the Needs of Rural Communities and Local School Districts

### Mayo Clinic Health System - Northland in Barron

Mayo Clinic Health System - Northland in Barron supported the Cameron School District with a Supporting Our Schools Award for the 2023-24 school year. The award funding will allow the district to expand its Comet Care Packs to middle and high school students and create a “Comet Closet” for the district.

Comet Care Packs is a weekly program that provides food for elementary school families struggling with food insecurity. There are no financial requirements to qualify for the program. The staff recognized that families with high school and middle school students could also benefit from this program; however, they needed additional funding to expand their reach. Funds secured from the Mayo Clinic Health

System award will enable the district to expand its reach, making the care packs available to the over 1,000 students in the district.



Pictured: Jenny Jorgenson, Community Engagement, Mayo Clinic Health System and school district staff Nichole Kohel, Food Services Director and Sarah Glaze, Middle School Guidance

The Comet Closet will be a new addition available to middle and high school students. It will contain donations of gently used Cameron Comet gear, clothing, shoes, sports equipment, new toiletry items and hygiene products. These donations will be available to any students in need.

In recognition of the vital role that schools play, including supporting children and families and the economy and future workforce. Mayo Clinic Health System (MCHS) in Northwest Wisconsin established the Supporting Our Schools Award in 2021. Schools within the MCHS service area can apply for funding opportunities that directly benefit and positively impact students and align with MCHS’ CHNA and strategic priorities.

## Addressing Food Insecurity with Childcare Partnership

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Oakridge in Osseo

In its continued commitment to rural communities and reducing health disparities, Mayo Clinic Health System in Osseo awarded a \$20,000 grant to the Childcare Partnership, a Western Dairyland Community Action Agency program. Funding will help to improve and expand the Food Boxes for Families program, a monthly food box offered to all families with children enrolled in regulated childcare programs.

The Food Boxes for Families program was designed to be part of a larger project that focuses on preventing the expulsion of children from childcare. Recently, the number of children expelled from early childhood programs has increased. Children are typically expelled from childcare for one of two reasons: the family’s inability to pay tuition or the program’s inability to handle the child’s challenging behavior. The Food Boxes for Families program addresses one of the root causes of challenging behaviors - hunger.



Food boxes ready to be delivered to childcare centers

Studies show that children from homes that lack consistent access to food are more likely to experience developmental impairments in language, motor skills, and behavior. Hungry children have a higher risk of illness, are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, and develop behavior problems. Childcare programs are a practical avenue to address childhood hunger because they are anchors in the community. Providing food boxes at the childcare centers also allows for an easy pickup location, as caregivers are already there, furthermore reducing barriers to obtaining food. Each family food box contains food for multiple dinners, snacks, and vouchers from Kwik Trip for fresh meat products and dairy.

Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin aims to harness partnerships with local childcare providers and youth-serving organizations as a powerful opportunity to reimagine opportunities to serve rural populations in new ways, including those focusing on reducing food insecurity, improving mental health, and supporting youth growth and development.

## Providing Shelter for Unhoused Residents in Menomonie, Wisconsin

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Red Cedar in Menomonie

Mayo Clinic Health System - Red Cedar (MCHS) in Menomonie contributed to the Stepping Stones Shelter Program to support the construction of a new emergency shelter in Menomonie. The shelter program provides emergency shelter, housing assistance and referral services to unhoused residents in Dunn County.

The new emergency shelter, set to be completed in November 2023, will house single men and women units and offer various services, including meals, case management,

employment assistance, and assistance in securing permanent housing. This new shelter will be in addition to two apartments already available in the community to house couples and families. Within its walls, Stepping Stones of Dunn County offers a variety of resources to assist those in need, including a food pantry, senior commodity boxes, a weekend kids' meal program, a farmers feed program, a community connections program and many volunteer opportunities. According to their mission, "Stepping Stones is a place where the community can come together to take care of its own."



Mayo Clinic Health System Rehabilitation Services staff present check to Stepping Stones of Dunn County

Mayo Clinic Health System understands that patients' health and well-being are influenced not only by health care, but by the health of the communities in which they live, work and raise families. As an active participant in fostering vibrant, healthy communities, our commitment to patients and staff extends beyond our walls. We're proud of our partnerships with local programs, initiatives and efforts that support the social determinants of health, including transportation, food, housing, financial and personal safety needs.

## Western Wisconsin Health Provides School Based Behavioral Health Services

### Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin

One of the most important health concerns identified by the most recent St. Croix County Community Health Needs Assessment is the increased need for mental health services. In response to this, Western Wisconsin Health (WWH) developed a Behavioral Health Program for local school districts that allows providers to see adolescent patients at the school, during school hours. This solution reduces two access-to-care barriers, by providing behavioral health services at a convenient location; and giving time back to the school so the child does not miss as much class time and the family does not have to schedule an appointment after work.

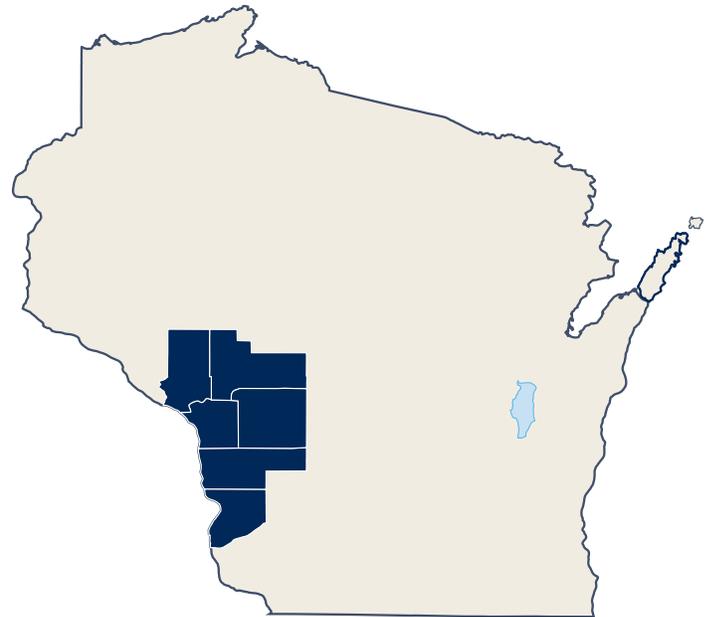
WWH partnered with the school districts of Baldwin-Woodville, Spring Valley, and Elmwood in 2022 to provide Behavioral Health Counseling. Last year, four WWH providers, Morgan Miller, Luke Owens, Nicole Helgeson and Lindsey Berg, consistently counseled over 86 patients throughout the school year, with the cost of care totaling \$322,220. WWH paid for the insurance coverage gap along with the provider travel expenses yielding a calculated community benefit of \$158,220.



WWH's Morgan Miller, MS, Licensed Professional Counselor, receiving the Rural Health Ambassador Award from the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

Through the most difficult times in a child's young life, Western Wisconsin Health and its behavioral health providers are invested in supporting their overall health and wellness through mind, body, and spirit. The WWH school based behavioral health program is just one of the many ways Western Wisconsin Health is redefining rural health care to help achieve our mission of Building a Healthier Tomorrow, together.

## Western Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$15,990,231**

### *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

#### **Gundersen Nurse: "I'm thrilled I found where I fit"**

##### **Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, La Crosse**

You never know when a foot-in-the-door opportunity will turn into a career to LOVE. That's exactly what happened for Lorinda Schwartz, RN.

"Before the (Gundersen) nurse internship program, I didn't feel ready to graduate," the CNA-turned-nurse intern says. "Now, I feel so prepared. I'm thrilled I found where I fit."

The Gundersen Region of Bellin and Gundersen Health System offers a competitively paid, 10-week nurse internship. After working closely with RN preceptors in one clinical area, students are one step ahead as they enter their final year of nursing school. Placement opportunities include a variety of positions in Gundersen hospitals, procedural and specialty areas, and in Gundersen clinics. And there is an opportunity for employment after the end of the summer internship, along with a potential RN job offer.

During COVID, Schwartz, who graduated from Viterbo University in La Crosse, worked at Gundersen Health System as a CNA, filling in wherever she was needed. When she was accepted into the nurse internship program, she started working in Postpartum.

"I loved it! Parents really depend on you to help them prepare for and adjust to a new baby," Schwartz says. "We are able to help educate parents before they leave the hospital with their little one."

Recruiters reached out to Schwartz with an opportunity. She could stay on and continue her internship if she verbally accepted an RN position at Gundersen upon graduation. Schwartz accepted – and she graduated in December 2022.



Lorinda Schwartz

"Knowing I had a job right when I graduated relieved so much stress," Schwartz says. "If you are feeling nervous or unprepared, this program will give you so much confidence."

## Nurturing Tomorrow's Health Care Heroes: The Vernon Memorial-Westby School Partnership

### Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua

In the scenic heartland of the Driftless Region, a remarkable collaboration is shaping the future of health care education. Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH) is proud to share the story of our ongoing partnership with Westby High School's Health Science Academy Program.

Led by dedicated instructor Heidi Hamilton, this program has brought the world of health care to life for students in the Westby School District. They've explored a curriculum including health occupations and medical terminology, which even offers college credits.

What sets this partnership apart is the hands-on approach. VMH was honored to open its doors, providing presentations, tours, and hands-on activities spanning various health care fields. From CPR to clinical informatics, the students dove deep.

The 2022-2023 cohort celebrated engaging presentations, interactive PowerPoints, and insightful tours. They shadowed across facilities of varying sizes, from the intimate Bland Clinic in Westby to the bustling hospital in Viroqua.



Students enrolled in the Health Science Academy program work on pregnancy testing during clinic rotation and education at the hospital.

The initiative is dedicated to enhancing its offerings, aiming to create a meaningful influence on students aspiring to enter the health care sector.

Looking forward, the program envisions a more in-depth exploration of medical terminology to offer students a more robust knowledge base. Additionally, it anticipates providing opportunities such as medical assistant training, exposure to health information management, volunteer hours, and potential youth apprenticeships.

The partnership between Vernon Memorial and Westby School is not just a regular program; it's all about developing the next generation. It's like planting seeds and watching them grow. We're here to help these future health care heroes learn and grow.

Vernon Memorial is excited to be part of this journey. We're looking forward to seeing our students succeed in their health care careers and make a big difference in our community and beyond.

## Health Equity

### Gundersen Mobile Medicine Team Brings Health Care to Rural Residents

#### Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, La Crosse

On Monroe County roads usually reserved for tractors, pickups and Amish buggies, a different kind of vehicle ambles through the rolling hills.

Physicians and residents from the Gundersen Region of Bellin and Gundersen Health System Health System ride with La Crosse's St. Clare Health Mission to provide care at local farms with St. Clare's Rotary Mobile Clinic, a full-scale, full-service family medicine unit.

Two Fridays each month – dubbed Fridays at the Farm – the team makes stops at farms that employ a predominantly migrant workforce.

The team provides acute care and disease management services. They also handle the unexpected injuries that occur while working on a farm. Many patients they see mostly use local hospitals or clinics for emergency care. The team wants to treat conditions early so trips to the emergency room are avoided.

“We’re getting to know a lot of people gradually,” shares Sarah Brown, MD, the attending Gundersen physician and program coordinator. “We try to keep people connected to health systems or build a bridge back to health care, if possible.”



*Kate Edsel, MD, tends to a wound on a patient's foot during a visit to a rural Monroe County farm on Dec. 9.*

For second-year resident Kate Edsall, MD, rounds at the farm allow her to get to know people in the community who she wouldn't otherwise see.

“This is a part of our community, but when we stay in the walls of our clinic, we don't always see all of that,” Dr. Edsall says. “Bringing care to people and helping to break down some of those barriers is a really neat opportunity and what we should be doing if we want to have healthy communities.”

“We view health care as a basic human right,” Dr. Brown says. “Our hope is also that caring for people with regularity can help prevent complications from diseases long term, prevent overutilization of emergency services and even reduce hospitalization rates.”

### Tomah Health, Viterbo Provide Foot Care

#### Tomah Health, Tomah

Dick Baumgarten is thankful that a partnership between Tomah Health and Viterbo University of La Crosse is helping area residents have healthy feet. The Tomah resident was one of 32 people to get complimentary foot care during a daylong Foot Care Clinic held at Tomah Health March 29.



*Tomah resident Dick Baumgarten, left, received foot care from Viterbo University DNP program third year student Kathryn Schomburg, RN, DNP, during a Foot Care Clinic held at Tomah Health.*

“It's hard at my age to get down to my feet and get a decent job, so this really works out good,” said Baumgarten of the treatment he received.

Tomah Health provided space for the clinic, staff resources and helped coordinate details with Viterbo.

Nurse practitioner students from Viterbo cleaned and moisturized the feet, assessed each foot for areas of concern, trimmed and clipped the nails to eliminate any friction, which can lead to further issues.

“The training is unlike anything students obtain in the classroom,” said Viterbo University assistant professor LuAnn Fowler, DNP, FNP-C. “This is very different from an in-clinic type of appointment setting evaluation.”

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### Grassroots Group Hopes to Turn Farm-Fresh Food Into Better Health

#### Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, La Crosse

Rooftop gardens are more than just a hobby in the Gundersen Region of Bellin and Gundersen Health System. Growing and harvesting healthy foods is tied to preventing, treating and even reversing chronic disease.



*Gundersen La Crosse Hospital Employee Garden flowers and vegetables*

Plant Partners, a group of about 130 Gundersen employee volunteers, is growing a wide selection of herbs, chard, kale, peppers, cucumbers, strawberries and more on the Gundersen La Crosse Hospital's employee terrace. And while staff from 16 departments oversee the garden beds, anyone can harvest what's there.

"Medicine is shifting toward disease prevention rather than treatment," says Anna Kitzmann, MD, ophthalmologist and Plant Partners founder. "The healthier people are, the less chance they have of developing chronic illnesses."

"We hope that growing produce right on campus helps our patients and staff see that food is medicine. What we put into our bodies has a direct link to our health," says Jake Larkin, PA-C, hospital medicine and Plant Partners volunteer.

The group hopes to scale each year, sharing the fresh harvest with patients and employees.

"We see lots of diet-related diseases in internal medicine," says Larkin. "We can treat patient symptoms, but by teaching more about diet and nutrition, we can actually help get to the root of the problem and empower patients to live healthier lives."

### St. Joe's vs Food Insecurity

#### Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics, Hillsboro

Hillsboro, Elroy, and Wonewoc are the three contiguous communities served by Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics (St. Joe's). The communities are sparsely populated with an average of 60% of the population living outside of the city limits on farms.

48% of these households are below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, but Employed) threshold. 45-55% of the school students are enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program, and in Hillsboro, two in five children under 18 are below the federal poverty level.

Because of the poverty level in our community, many struggle to access healthy food and nutrition education, which has impeded their health improvement.

However, our assets include two highly active and engaged food pantries with existing supply chain support from Second Harvest Foodbank of Southwest Wisconsin and a hospital that is dedicated to addressing socioeconomic factors.

Despite having two great food pantries, people still struggle to access the resources. This is due to a number of factors including transportation and stigma.

We had heard about a program that Second Harvest was trying to roll out called "HungerCare." The program provides a monthly box of healthy food and recipes, all designed by a registered dietitian, like

programs such as "Blue Apron" or "Hello, Fresh." Our local food pantries were already being supplied by Second Harvest for regular food pantry items, so we were able to use their supply chain to deliver the HungerCare boxes to the pantries for pick up by the participants.

Initially, it was intended that the participants would collect their food boxes at the food pantries on the 3rd Thursday of the month. However, at our first distribution date in March, we saw first-hand the limitations that many people face in our communities.

One participant was an elderly lady around 90 years old who was wheelchair-bound and being cared for by a younger relative. They lived together and had no vehicle. During the first distribution day, this lady had to be wheeled three blocks in the pouring rain by her caregiver to the food pantry as she was not able to be left alone. They came to collect their box of food and do their weekly shopping at the food pantry. When they had finished shopping, they headed back out in the pouring rain with bags of food piled high on the lap of the lady in the wheelchair and several hanging from the handles. This was a common occurrence for them. It was at this moment that we decided that we simply had to figure out a way to deliver these boxes of food.



Brooke Mikla, Community Wellness Coordinator and Dan Howard, Community Relations Manager at Gundersen St. Joseph's make monthly food deliveries to HungerCare participants.

By the time of our second monthly distribution, we had developed a delivery route that reached 35 participants and covered around 75 square miles of rural back roads. We are now in our fourth month of the program and continuing to make home deliveries. We are currently looking at expanding the capacity to serve more patients and feel we can comfortably serve 100 patients per month through a combination of pantry pick-up and home delivery.

## Community Forums Address COVID-19 Misinformation and Mental Health

### Mayo Clinic Health System Southwest Wisconsin, La Crosse

Mayo Clinic Health System in Southwest Wisconsin hosted a series of virtual community forums in 2022 to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The forums covered topics such as misinformation, mental health, and innovative treatments.

One of the key topics discussed was misinformation. The forums provided an opportunity to address misinformation head-on and to help people learn how to identify and avoid it.

Another important topic discussed was the psychological trauma of the pandemic. The pandemic has had a profound impact on people's mental health, and many people are struggling with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The forums provided resources and support for people who are struggling with the mental health effects of the pandemic.



Dr. Paul Mueller moderating COVID Community Forum

The forums also discussed innovative treatments for COVID-19. There are now a number of effective treatments available for COVID-19, and the forums helped people learn about these treatments and how to access them.

Here are some of the key points that were discussed in the forums:

- The importance of getting vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19.
- How to identify and avoid misinformation about COVID-19.
- Resources for people who are struggling with the mental health effects of the pandemic.
- Innovative treatments for COVID-19.

The Mayo Clinic Health System community forums were a valuable resource for people seeking accurate information about COVID-19 and other health topics. The forums helped people stay up to date on the latest developments in the pandemic and learn how to protect themselves and their loved ones.

## Tomah Health Offers Noise Safety

### Tomah Health, Tomah

In the U.S., hearing loss is the third most common chronic physical condition after high blood pressure and arthritis. Tomah Health Community Outreach staff took note of the statistic and provided some sound-safe tips during the 20th edition of the annual Monroe County National Night Out.



*Lily Colby of Camp Douglas, left, was fitted for paper ears by Tomah Health community health educator Whitney Sanjari at Monroe County National Night Out Aug. 1.*

Children and parents learned about noise-induced hearing loss and how to prevent loud noises from causing permanent damage. Parents were given tips to reduce noise exposure and step-by-step instructions to place decibel limits on their children's devices.

"Kids loved learning how their ears worked and making their own giant ear-bands," said Community Health Educator Whitney Sanjari. "One lucky winner took home their own pair of decibel-controlled headphones."

Despite temperatures in the upper 90s, hundreds of residents attended the annual event billed as a way to bring organizations together to share information on how to keep families safe.



