

## NEWS

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# Wisconsin Health System-Employer Partnerships Make Health Care More Accessible

*New WHA/WisEye video highlights how employers and health care providers  
are working to make Wisconsin a healthier state*

**MADISON (September 2, 2016)** ----- Wisconsin hospitals and health systems are partnering with local employers to make health care more accessible and convenient for employees, with an even bigger goal in mind: creating healthier communities.

Thousands of Wisconsin employers are working with their local health systems on wellness and health-related programs and activities that range from adding on- or near-site medical clinics, to bringing in nurses and health coaches to conduct health risk assessments or design and staff employee wellness classes and fitness programs.

“As employers compete to attract and retain valuable talent in their workforce, they have found wellness programs are a key recruitment tool,” according to Wisconsin Hospital Association President/CEO Eric Borgerding. “Wisconsin health systems have the clinical expertise and great depth of knowledge in prevention to help employers design wellness programs and run on-site clinics that meet the needs of their employees, while helping to moderate health care costs.”

There are many notable and successful employer-health system partnerships statewide, but a new video produced by WHA and Wisconsin Eye, “A Partnership of Wellness”

<https://youtu.be/O9Whs1ia6Y8> features a unique partnership between Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH) in Viroqua and Organic Valley, an independent cooperative of organic farmers based in La Farge, Wisconsin.

While the towns are small, the partnership they have fostered over the past decade has had outsized benefits to both organizations. Each is committed to the other’s success, and they understand the importance of working together to improve the health of not only their employees, but all local residents.

Kyle Bakkum, CEO of Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH) says the partnership has had benefits for both organizations.

“By interacting with the staff of Organic Valley, many of their employees are now aware of the health care services that are available in their own backyard here at the hospital in Viroqua and at the clinic in La Farge,” Bakkum said.

Amber Wendorf, Organic Valley’s wellness program manager, said the benefits of the relationship they have with their local health system reach far beyond the campus of her organization.

“Working together with VMH, we can improve the community’s health and that helps with our recruitment and retention efforts,” Wendorf said. “We hire employees who follow our mission. They care about the health of the environment, their own health, and the food they eat. We need to provide them with those same opportunities when they come to work. While it’s great to have those opportunities here on site, it is one thing to be healthy eight hours a day, but then go home and fall into those unhealthy habits.”

More than 70 percent of Organic Valley’s employees participate in the company’s wellness program.

“We have seen a decrease in smoking, a drop in the number of employees who were diabetic, and a big increase in attendance in our wellness classes,” Wendorf said.

Borgerding said those are the kind of results that employers and health care organizations are hoping to achieve.

“Hospitals and health systems are contributing to the economic strength of our employers by providing clinical and wellness services, helping their employees take control of their health, and making health care accessible in even some of our smallest communities,” according to Borgerding. “Wisconsin has a reputation for delivering high-quality, high-value health care. Our goal is become equally well-known as a state where we are all working together to build healthier communities.”

“A Partnership of Wellness” is the second program in a series produced by WHA and WisconsinEye dedicated to building awareness of Wisconsin’s high-quality, high-value health care.

Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/O9Whs1ia6Y8>.