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"Stop the COVID Spread!" Coalition Launches First Ad Campaign

UW System President Tommy Thompson urges the public to "buckle down" in PSA

As COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Wisconsin continue to rise, the "[Stop the COVID Spread!](#)" coalition launched its first ad campaign this week with an urgent message to Wisconsin residents about the crucial need for preventative measures to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 across the state.



In the ad, Tommy Thompson, who was Wisconsin Governor from 1987 to 2001, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 2001 to 2005, and is the current President of the University of Wisconsin (UW) System, alongside students from the University of Wisconsin System schools, encourages Wisconsin residents to stay safe. The UW System is one of the members of the [recently launched](#) "Stop the COVID Spread!" coalition.

"We've faced real challenges this year, and the virus continues to spread in our state. But, each of us has it in our power to turn things around," says Thompson in the ad. "It's time to mask up, buckle down, wash your hands, maintain social distance. Come on Wisconsin, together we can do this."

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Fact Sheet and Webinar Available for Hospitals Seeking Emergency Workforce Resources

WHA has been working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to address workforce shortage issues in Wisconsin hospitals related to COVID-19. DHS has established a process to access additional workforce resources and prepared a [fact sheet](#) outlining that process. The fact sheet emphasizes that prior to requesting emergency response resources, providers first should attempt to address needs locally, through existing staffing contracts and supply chains.

Once local options have been exhausted, a hospital may contact its regional Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalition Coordinator (HERC), who will work with the local health officer to make the request via WebEOC to DHS on behalf of the hospital. Upon approval, DHS will make a [WEAVR request](#). If there is no response or an insufficient response from WEAVR, DHS can escalate the request to FEMA. The fact sheet includes the criteria that FEMA will expect to be met before FEMA will provide workforce resources. DHS has emphasized that hospitals should provide all of the information included under "FEMA Requests for Medical Resources" when making the initial request to expedite the process.

WHA held webinar October 6 explaining how to use the process. You can access a [recording of this webinar](#).

WHA Board Meets Virtually, Grapples with COVID and Other Issues

WHA Board Chair Dan Meyer, president, Aurora BayCare Medical Center, called to order the WHA Board of Directors virtually on October 15 with a substantial agenda. WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding kicked off the meeting by updating the Board on the Association's activities related to the COVID-19 surge, staff news, and the ongoing work to advance other priorities. The Board also heard updates from the Board's representatives to the American Hospital Association Regional Policy Board and the WHA councils.

New Board Members

The Board unanimously approved Pam White, chief nursing officer, Mayo Health System/Northwest Wisconsin Region and Imran Andrabi, president and CEO, ThedaCare as new at-large directors. Also of note, last month the Board unanimously approved a temporary change to the WHA bylaws to extend the terms of the current directors and officers for one year in recognition of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on normal Board operations.



Pam White



Imran Andrabi

Marquette Law School Poll

Professor Charles Franklin, director of the Marquette Law School Poll, dissected the latest Marquette polling, including questions related to health care and COVID. Franklin said that according to the polling in October, 27% said they are very worried about being ill from the coronavirus, an increase from 21% in September. Twenty-one percent said they are not at all worried, virtually the same as the 19% in September. Franklin noted that in October, 72% agreed that masks should be required in public places, while 26% disagreed with requiring masks. The polling indicated that in August, 69% supported a mask requirement and 29% opposed.

State and Federal Advocacy Report

Borgerding provided the Board with an overview of WHA's coronavirus response, describing the close work with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and others within the administration, assistance provided to and meetings with legislators and staff, and work with a coalition representing leading health care, business, and local government organizations focused on containing the spread of the virus. Borgerding said to the Board, "WHA is well aware of the challenges you are all facing as COVID and non-COVID patient care surges, while at the same time the toll COVID is taking on the workforce is stressing and challenging health care capacity." Borgerding continued, "With all this in mind, the WHA team has been extremely active working to relieve stress points identified by your teams."

Members of the WHA team provided details of the WHA response, including describing the packages of policy items submitted to the administration that would help address workforce and facility capacity issues, work on DHS guidance documents related to post-acute care and workforce issues, and coordination on testing and the alternative care facility issues. The Board also heard about state orders requiring masks and limiting public gatherings and challenges to those actions. Borgerding described the multi-industry coalition public service announcement campaign aimed at stopping the COVID spread.

WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations Jon Hoelter shared an update on pressing issues at the federal level. Hoelter noted that Congress had been unable to come to agreement on a COVID package due to disagreements over the level of spending. Fortunately, both sides have included more funding for hospitals in the Provider Relief Fund, but recent guidance from the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (HHS) changed how hospitals can use these funds. Instead of supplanting lost revenue due to COVID, HHS changed guidance to be based on a change in hospitals' operating margin. WHA and the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative sent a letter to HHS expressing concern over these changes and is continuing to ask for support from the Wisconsin congressional delegation to get HHS to revert back to the former guidance. Hoelter also covered recent work by WHA to address drug manufacturers' efforts to deny 340B discounts at contract pharmacies. WHA led a coalition letter signed by over 70 hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and HIV Ryan White clinics expressing concerns to HHS and has also been garnering support from our congressional delegation to get drug manufacturers to stop these practices.

WHA Senior Vice President, Government Relations Kyle O'Brien provided a preview of the upcoming state budget, emphasizing the budget priorities, process considerations, and immediate next steps. O'Brien also discussed the key member-hosted virtual roundtables with Senate and Assembly leadership and other virtual legislative visits. O'Brien provided details of a variety of ongoing and emerging priorities, including licensure issues.

WHA Senior Vice President of Public Policy Joanne Alig updated the Board on the work done by WHA's Medicaid Policy Work Group. Alig conveyed priorities for the upcoming biennium in several areas including reimbursement, telemedicine, behavioral health and administrative efficiencies. She noted that it will be a difficult state budget as DHS is already estimating a need for

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\$1.1 billion in state funding as the Medicaid “cost-to-continue.” Alig also provided an update on recent work by WHA in the area of health care costs. This work includes understanding the benefits of integrated care, which is highly prevalent in Wisconsin, and understanding that the total cost and value of care should include not just unit price, but utilization, quality, and access as well. Alig shared information about a [recent study](#) from HC Trends, a research affiliate of Benefit Service Group Analytics (BSGA) that describes the high value of health care in Wisconsin.

Governor’s Task Force Supports Protecting 340B Program

The Governor’s Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices submitted a [156-page final report](#) to Governor Tony Evers on October 21. Among the highlights of the report was a recommendation that would help protect the 340B program.

The report noted that the 340B program “was established to provide relief to safety net providers from high drug prices and allow these providers to (a) stretch scarce federal resources as far as possible, (b) reach more vulnerable patients, and (c) deliver more comprehensive services.” It also cited policies some other states have pursued that would prohibit pharmacy benefit managers and other third-party payers from the practice of “discriminatory reimbursement” whereby they provide lower reimbursement rates to providers that receive 340B discounts. The report suggested such policies prohibiting discriminatory reimbursement may help covered entities reinvest 340B savings to support patient care.

In addition to 340B, the report made several other recommendations to reduce the cost of prescription drugs, including:

- Capping insulin copays
- Increasing cost transparency in the drug supply chain
- Enhancing anti-trust enforcement of drug companies and boosting consumer protections
- Establishing a statewide repository for unused or discontinued prescriptions to help needy Wisconsinites
- Creating a purchasing entity at the state to leverage purchasing power for public sector employees and save taxpayer dollars
- Advocating for federal action to end anti-competitive drug manufacturer practices that drive up or maintain high drug costs

WHA thanks Brian Stephens, president and CEO of Door County Medical Center, for serving as a hospital representative and helping advance discussions on the Task Force, which met eight times between November 2019 and August 2020.

For questions, contact WHA Vice President of Policy Development [Laura Rose](#) or Vice President of Federal and State Relations [Jon Hoelter](#).

OCI Reports More Options, Lower Premiums in 2021 Individual Market

Many Wisconsin residents will have more insurer choices and see lower premiums in 2021. Based on [information](#) released this week from Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OCI), the number of insurer choices in the individual market is increasing in 23 counties, and overall premiums are going down by 3.4% percent. Wisconsin is doing better than the nation as a whole, which [according to CMS](#) will see an average premium reduction in the second lowest cost silver plan of 2% for 2021.

“We know that due to COVID-19 and the resulting impact on employment this year, some Wisconsin residents may be looking for health insurance in the individual market for the first time,” said WHA Senior Vice President of Public Policy Joanne Alig. “It’s good news that people will find more choice of insurers at a reduced premium.”

OCI credits the state’s Wisconsin Healthcare Stability Program, which was supported by WHA and enacted in 2017. The program helps offset risk in the individual market, leading to more certainty in the market. The Governor and Legislature fully funded the program in the last biennial budget.

Open enrollment to sign up for coverage in the individual market is scheduled to begin November 1 and continue through December 15, 2020.

See OCI’s [map of health insurers](#) participating in each county.

SSM and WHA Leader Damond Boatwright Appointed to Speaker's Task Force on Racial Disparities



Damond Boatwright

On October 21, Damond Boatwright, regional president of operations for SSM Wisconsin and WHA's 2019 Board chair, was appointed to a recently formed, bipartisan Speaker's Task Force focusing on ways to address racial disparities, educational opportunities, public safety and police policies and standards. The Task Force includes four members of the state Assembly, two Democrats and two Republicans, as well as 28 community leaders from across Wisconsin.

"More than 100 people applied to be on the task force. After a month of interviews, we will now move forward with an unprecedented, community-focused group," said Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) in a statement announcing the members of this Task Force. "The membership represents a diversity of experiences, backgrounds and geography of the state. I want to thank the legislators and community members for agreeing to be part of the task force."

In late August, Vos announced the creation of this Speaker's Task Force, which is now being led by two members of the Legislature as co-chairs, Republican Majority Leader Rep. Jim Steineke (R-Kaukauna) and Rep. Sheila Stubbs (D-Madison).

The Task Force will hold its first meeting at 1 p.m. on October 28 in the Wisconsin State Capitol. Like other recent Speaker's task forces, this group is expected to develop recommendations that can be pursued by the state Assembly in the next legislative session which begins in January.

Federal Appeals Court Declines Hospitals' Appeal of Site-Neutral, 340B Decisions

On October 16, the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit declined to take up appeals from the American Hospital Association (AHA) to reconsider recent decisions on the legality of [cuts to 340B](#) hospitals and hospital outpatient departments – also known as [site-neutral payments](#).

Both of these issues have been key advocacy areas of WHA for a number of years and together have an estimated \$80 million negative annual impact on Wisconsin hospitals and health systems.

While AHA had previously prevailed in court on both issues in 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) appealed both and three-judge panels ruled in HHS' favor regarding 340B on July 17 and regarding site-neutral payments on July 31. In both cases, the court cited the Chevron deference doctrine in which the courts give wide deference to federal agencies in administrative rulemaking so long as the court finds they are rational or reasonable.

The AHA has said it is currently evaluating bringing both of these cases to the U.S. Supreme Court. For more information, contact WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations [Jon Hoelter](#).

("Stop the COVID Spread!" Coalition Launches First Ad Campaign . . . continued from page 1)

The initial five-figure campaign, funded by the [Healthy Wisconsin Alliance](#), includes a 30-second video that will run as a public service announcement on broadcast channels statewide, as well as a paid digital campaign including video and banner ads.

"As Wisconsin continues to face an uphill battle against COVID-19, it is more important now than ever that we take precautionary measures and shoulder the responsibility of protecting one another together," said Eric Borgerding, Wisconsin Hospital Association president and CEO. "The condition of our pandemic is visible in the alarming increase in COVID infections, and for the past month, daily new records in COVID hospitalizations, breaching the 1,000 mark recently, more than tripling in the last 30 days, and so far, with no slow-down in sight. The direct and indirect impacts of COVID spread in our communities are increasingly stressing our outstanding health care system and continuing to challenge our health care heroes – those nurses, custodians, doctors, technicians and many others who keep working long hours behind masks, behind face shields, in gowns and gloves, to keep Wisconsin's great health care accessible and safe."

Borgerding continued, "We must do our part to curb the spread so that our health care workers and those on the front lines can do their jobs effectively. We are urging Wisconsin residents: take precautionary measures so we can all stay safe and healthy."

The new ad campaign follows the launch of the "Stop the COVID Spread!" coalition. In the week since launch, the coalition has grown significantly to include 30 businesses, health care and advocacy groups from around the state.

Watch the [full PSA](#). Learn more about the [Stop the COVID Spread!](#) Coalition.

PricePoint – Wisconsin Hospitals Accountable for Transparency



Wisconsin hospitals have led the country in sharing information on the cost, quality, and safety of the care they provide in their communities – making Wisconsin a national model for health care transparency.



[PricePoint](#) (launched in 2005) provides hospital-specific information about health care services and charges in Wisconsin – but it goes one step further by also providing information on the professional, rehabilitation, skilled nursing, ancillary and pharmacy services that may accompany the various procedures and treatments performed by the hospital. This gives a better understanding about all the services that make up patient care and how those services contribute to the charges seen on a bill or in a report from the insurance company.

Of course, every patient is different. The actual charges will vary depending on a patient's unique health situation, the specific providers, insurance and any financial assistance for these services.

The PricePoint website was launched February 11, 2005. More than 80,000 pages were downloaded the first week it was available to the public. Today the PricePoint website has over 250,00 pageviews annually.

The information displayed on PricePoint should be used as a starting point for an informed discussion between the consumer, the doctor and the insurance company.

Visit the [PricePoint website](#). See [The Valued Voice article from 2-11-05](#).



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