

WHA On Capitol Hill Urges Congress to Address Rural Hospital Issues, Including Pausing Removal of Health Professional Shortage Areas

WHA was joined by hospital leaders from across Wisconsin for a visit to Capitol Hill on June 21. The group of health care advocates visited Wisconsin's congressional delegation to build support for fixing several rural health care issues and extending a key incentive for value-based payment reforms.

Participating in the Capitol Hill visits were Hayward Area Memorial Hospital & Water's Edge CEO Luke Beirl, Advocate Aurora Health Director, Federal Government Affairs Anthony Curry, WHA Vice President of Federal and State Relations Jon Hoelter, Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative Director of Advocacy Jeremy Levin, Marshfield Clinic Vice President of Physician and Advanced Practice Clinician Relations Scott Polenz and Marshfield Clinic Director, Federal Government Relations Brad Wolters.

The group of hospital leaders advocated for a number of rural issues including:

- Having Wisconsin's Congressional Delegation urge HRSA to pause planned actions to remove up to 47 areas of Wisconsin from the list of designated [health professional shortage areas](#). This action would jeopardize access to tools that sustain rural care, such as enhanced Medicare/Medicaid payments, access to the Conrad-30 J-1 VISA waiver program, and loan repayment.
- Cosponsoring the [Rural Health Fairness in Competition Act](#). This legislation would allow new provider-based Rural Health Clinics to receive cost-based reimbursement instead of the lower reimbursement rates instituted in the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act.
- Cosponsoring the [Rural Hospitals Support Act](#). This legislation would extend the Medicare-Dependent and Low-Volume Hospital Adjustment designation for "tweener" rural hospitals that currently expire September 30, 2022. Without these designations, 17 Wisconsin hospitals could face cuts of up to \$19 million annually.

In addition to these rural issues, the group also advocated for extending a key incentive to participate in value-based payment programs. Among other things, [The Value in Health Care Act of 2021](#) would extend a 5% bonus incentive payment for accountable care organizations (ACOs) participating in advanced value-based payment models that is slated to expire at the end of 2022. Given Wisconsin's low fee-for-service Medicare rates compared to other states, value-based payments are a way of rewarding high-quality high-value health care. Wisconsin currently has nine ACOs based in the state as well as nine ACOs based in other states that cover Wisconsin Medicare beneficiaries.

WHA is continuing to build support for these key programs that sustain rural health care and value-based payment models. Contact WHA vice president of Federal and State Relations [Jon Hoelter](#) with questions.



WHA and hospital leaders meet with Congressman Scott Fitzgerald (fourth from right).



WHA and hospital leaders meet with Congressman Mark Pocan (pictured at left).