

WHA's Borgerding, Other Health Care Leaders Discuss Impact of Election on Health Care Policy

WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding participated in a Wisconsin Health News panel discussion held virtually on Nov. 29. Borgerding and fellow panelists representing doctors, nurses, health plans and nursing homes discussed the impact of the elections on health care-related issues, as well as previewed top priorities for the upcoming legislative session.



Borgerding participated in the Wisconsin Health News Panel held virtually on Nov. 29

Borgerding said that while the election results did not change the balance of power in Madison, like every election there will be many new lawmakers and staff. "There are a lot of new legislators, like there are every two years. While the balance of power hasn't changed too much, there are a lot of new decision makers coming in, and that's always an opportunity," said Borgerding. "You always have to be thinking about who's coming in and making sure that when they do come in—whether that be at the Legislature or at cabinet level—that you're having interactions with them and that they're understanding issues from your perspective ... to quote my favorite lyricist, constant change is here to stay ..."

Panelists shared their top health care priorities for the upcoming legislative session. For hospitals, Borgerding emphasized reimbursement as an ongoing budget issue.

"Reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid programs, which is woefully below cost, has a real impact, especially as enrollment in both of those programs is growing. And the ability to recoup those costs, to shift those costs, to everyone else is shrinking very rapidly."

Borgerding later noted that Wisconsin's Legislature has prioritized funding of the Medicaid program over the years. He said, "As a non-Medicaid expansion state, the legislature has not abandoned, in any way, funding that program while at the same time rejecting Medicaid expansion."

All on the panel agreed that workforce is another huge issue. Borgerding emphasized the challenges of wage inflation and the competition for recruiting health care workers from neighboring states, noting that Michigan is investing a significant amount of funding into their health care workforce. Licensure and licensure reform are also challenging issues, but important to address in order to better utilize the health care workers we have in Wisconsin right now or those that are trying to become a health care worker in this state.

Borgerding added, "COVID stressed the public health system because hospitals and health systems had to step in like never before to play more typical public health functions. So there's a lot of aspects of public health that have been weakened as a result of COVID... There's a lot of reasons to look really closely at public health, particularly in this next state budget."

Borgerding spoke of the bureaucracy, regulation and red tape that occupies that space between the patient and provider. When speaking of solutions, he noted that either through legislation or working collaboratively with some of the payers in Wisconsin, we might be able to make some progress on some of these issues.

He continued, "Wisconsin is very unique in that we have a lot of provider-sponsored community health plans. That's a unique thing for a reason. It also means that there's opportunity to collaborate and work together on a whole host of issues ranging from regulation to transparency."

John Nygren, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of Health Plans, agreed: “We have a lot of similarities between our different organizations yet oftentimes we end up on the opposite sides of issues. But, are there things that we can work together on? [Eric] and I are actually working to find those. If the government follows a similar path, I think this will be a good session.”

Borgerding concluded by recognizing some of the great strengths, which are “attributable to organizations and individuals that we represent on this call, as well as many others.” He continued, “We have a great health care system. It’s not perfect, but it’s pretty darn strong. And we have a lot of access to care and that’s a tribute to the way that we’ve gone about it in this state.”

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