

IN THIS ISSUE

WHA Raising Awareness of Safe, Accessible Emergency Care 1

State Gives Updates, Recommendations on Hospital PPE Supply 1

US Senate Adds \$75 Billion to CARES Act Funding for Hospitals and Health Care Providers 2

WHA Unveils “Thank You, Health Care Heroes” Video 3

WHA Raising Awareness of Safe, Accessible Emergency Care

As Wisconsin citizens continue to shelter at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, WHA is ramping up efforts to remind the public and policymakers that people experiencing potentially life-threatening health conditions should not hesitate to utilize Wisconsin’s safe and available emergency departments.



WHA engaged this week with multiple media covering the effects of the pandemic. WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding on April 29 discussed the availability of the state’s emergency departments with [Milwaukee’s TMJ4](#), stressing how public perception is likely skewed due to coverage of national and overseas hotspots showing conditions much different than what has happened in Wisconsin.

“We really need to make sure that folks know our EDs, our urgent care facilities . . . have been open, safe and accessible all during the pandemic,” Borgerding said.

Borgerding and WHA Chief Medical Officer Mark Kaufman, MD also appeared on a Metropolitan Milwaukee Association Chamber of Commerce (MMAC) [daily briefing](#)

(continued on page 3)

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

May 12, 2020
Resiliency Webinar: Signature Strengths at Work
 Webinar

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State Gives Updates, Recommendations on Hospital PPE Supply

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain the state’s supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), the State of Wisconsin has created a system for prioritizing distribution of state-acquired PPE. The state also recently announced a partnership that could help hospitals and clinics decontaminate certain N95 respirator masks, extending their useful life.

PPE Process

The state’s Emergency Operation’s Center (SEOC) – the central hub of state government COVID-19 activity – sent a message to numerous health care entities explaining that the state is prioritizing PPE distribution to those providing direct patient care, such as hospitals, clinics and long-term care providers. To streamline the distribution process, county and tribal emergency management directors are now in charge of the state-obtained PPE distribution process.

According to the SEOC message, care providers are expected to “make reasonable attempts to source PPE and other needed supplies locally and through existing supply channels” before approaching the state for PPE. At that point, providers are encouraged to reach out their local director for more information. Those directors can be found starting on page 17 of [this directory](#).

(continued on page 2)



N95 Respirator Masks – Decontamination Update

This week the state’s Department of Health Services sent an alert to numerous health care entities with news of a public/private partnership allowing the state to obtain a decontamination system for N95 respirators, which could extend the life of this PPE by several-fold.

In partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Defense Logistics Agency in the U.S. Department of Defense, the state is expected to receive access by mid-May to a [Battelle CCDS Critical Care Decontamination System](#). The system uses hydrogen peroxide gas to decontaminate up to 10,000 N95 respirator masks daily. The N95s must be NIOSH-certified and cannot be cellulose based.

The state is developing a process to collect, decontaminate and then return N95 respirator masks to qualified health care personnel and will provide further details soon. In the meantime, Wisconsin health care providers interested in using the Battelle CCDS should retain used N95 masks for future decontamination, making sure to mark each mask with the name of the person to whom it was issued.

US Senate Adds \$75 Billion to CARES Act Funding for Hospitals and Health Care Providers

The U.S. Senate agreed on April 21 to add nearly \$500 billion in additional funding for an interim coronavirus relief package. Dubbed “COVID 3.5,” the legislation was agreed to via unanimous consent in a pro-forma session, to prevent the need for the entire Senate to act on it. It was signed into law on April 24.

While most of the funding will inject additional funds into the depleted Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses, an additional \$75 billion was also added to the Public Health and Social Services Fund for hospitals and health care providers. That brings total funding for COVID relief for hospitals in this fund to \$175 billion.

WHA has been strongly advocating for additional funding targeted toward hospitals and health systems to assist them with significant losses they are facing after heeding the CDC’s and U.S. Surgeon General’s recommendations in mid-March to pause elective surgeries and medical procedures. Wisconsin hospitals are estimated to be losing \$265 million per week in operating revenue due to following this guidance. WHA has advocated that states receive this funding proportionally based on the amount of the U.S. population they serve to ensure states like Wisconsin are not shortchanged.

While the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services had previously distributed \$30 billion from this pot based on a Medicare fee-for-service formula, they acknowledged on April 22 that this had been done only to get revenues out as quickly as possible. HHS also said that they would be rebasing those payments along with another \$20 billion in payments to health care providers, so that providers would see payments from this \$50 billion pot based on their percent of overall net operating revenue. HHS also announced additional distributions that would soon be coming from the CARES Act, including:

- \$10 billion for hospitals and providers based on their share of COVID patients treated as of April 10.
- \$10 billion for rural hospitals.
- An unknown amount that would be used to pay providers Medicare rates for treating uninsured COVID patients.
- Future amounts for additional providers such as nursing homes, dentists, and Medicaid-only providers.

While it is unclear how the additional \$75 billion will be distributed, HHS said in a call on April 22 that they intend to base all distributions going forward on the principles of getting payments out quickly in a fair, equitable and transparent manner. WHA will continue advocating to Wisconsin’s Congressional Delegation and the Trump administration that future distribution formulas take into consideration impacts on Wisconsin.

WHA Unveils “Thank You, Health Care Heroes” Video

Inspired by the multitude of positive messages of hope and determination WHA member hospitals and health systems have posted on their social media pages during the COVID-19 pandemic, WHA debuted a statewide “[Thank You, Health Care Heroes](#)” video on all WHA social media platforms April 22. The video is also featured on WHA’s website.

“The past few months have been a challenge,” WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding said in a message to all WHA member leaders announcing the video. “But through it all, you have ‘leaned in,’ displaying hospitals’ strong commitment to serving the community.

“No matter the circumstances, hospitals are there every day. You are our fearless front line, and for that, we want to say thank you,” Borgerding said.



(WHA Raising Awareness of Safe, Accessible Emergency Care . . . continued from page 1)

on April 28, sharing in-depth analysis of [WHA’s COVID-19 data dashboard](#) and what it reveals about Wisconsin health care’s effective response to the pandemic. Borgerding discussed how some state hospitals and systems have started to carefully phase back in to providing care temporarily halted due to federal guidance in mid-March.

Borgerding and Dr. Kaufman’s presentation and analysis was followed by MMAC’s discussion of state government’s response to the pandemic and its effects with State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) and Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau).

Meanwhile, WHA’s Government Relations department has been proactively working with the entire Wisconsin State Legislature and staff, helping provide suggested social media messaging elected officials can use on their Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. Legislators have been especially active on social media during the pandemic and can effectively engage with their constituents to remind them how important it is to utilize available and safe emergency care.

For more information about WHA’s messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic, contact WHA Vice President of Communications [Mark Grapentine](#).

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