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WHA Leadership Academy Develops Tomorrow's Health Care Leaders

“It’s inspired participants to keep learning and know that they have resources not only in WHA but in their fellow cohort members,” says Leigh Ann Larson, WHA Vice President of Education and Corporate Partnerships, of the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy.

In January 2027, WHA will launch its next cohort of the Health Care Leadership Academy. In partnership with the Wisconsin School of Business Center for Professional and Executive Development (CPED), the five-month program is designed to develop the next generation of health care leaders. The academy is open to WHA members in both clinical and nonclinical roles who aspire to the C-Suite or wish to advance their executive leadership careers.

Register here

For Dr. Wendy Ledesma, a physician executive with Sauk Prairie Healthcare in Prairie du Sac, the academy was a pivotal career turning point. A 2022 program graduate, Dr. Ledesma credits the experience with inspiring her to pursue an MBA from the Wisconsin School of Business, which she earned in May 2026.

“I realized that to create meaningful and sustainable impact in health care leadership, I wanted a stronger foundation in business and organizational leadership,” Dr. Ledesma said. “The experience helped me recognize that physician leadership is not only about caring for patients, but also about helping shape systems that support caregivers, improve quality, and strengthen communities.”

The upcoming academy features a combination of virtual and in-person sessions, with on-campus instruction held at the Fluno Center on the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus. Taught by CPED and WHA instructors, the curriculum covers a range of topics, including strategic leadership, health care fundamentals, ethics, artificial intelligence, leading organizational project management and conflict resolution.

In addition to structured learning, the academy provides opportunities for participants to build relationships and learn from peers across the state. At the June graduation gathering, participants received a graduation certificate, a celebratory visit from Bucky Badger, and priority consideration for admission to the Wisconsin School of Business' professional MBA program.

During the graduation ceremony, participants were asked which element of the program was most impactful and why. Larson says the responses often highlight the value of the connections and shared experiences developed throughout the program.

“To hear them talk about these life-changing experiences or career-changing experiences they’ve had is so powerful,” says Larson. “There’s a level of confidentiality and it allows people to be very vulnerable and honest. I’ve also had natural competitors say it’s great to be in a space where it’s safe to talk about our similarities and differences and bounce ideas off each other. We have groups that still meet to this day.”

The impact of the academy extends beyond graduation. Since its inception, several alumni have gone on to become CEOs, while others have pursued additional education, earning master's and doctoral degrees.

Registration is open for the 2027 cohort, with one month remaining to secure a spot. Partial scholarships are available to the first 20 registrants.

To learn more about the WHA Health Care Leadership Academy, click here.

To hear more perspectives from people involved in the program, click here.

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EDUCATION EVENTS

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Hospital Board Education

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Fall 2026 Annual Survey Training