

Vol. 70, Issue 29

Thursday, July 23, 2026

Grant Opportunities and Slippery Slopes

WHA Workforce Council discusses strengthening and protecting the health care workforce

the Wisconsin Department of Workforce (DWD), as a guest at their July 17, 2026 meeting. Secretary Pechacek provided an update on two expanded opportunities to strengthen the health care workforce.

The first is in the form of a federal expansion of the Pell grant program. Pell grants are awarded to low-income students to pursue post-secondary education opportunities. The program has now been expanded to include short-term education and training. Responsibility for how to administer the grants is with each state's governor, and Gov. Tony Evers has delegated the rollout of the expanded Pell grants to DWD. Secretary Pechacek shared that providers of short-term education and training, such as technical colleges, certification providers or online programs, can apply now to be Pell grant eligible. WHA Senior Vice President of Workforce and Clinical Practice Ann Zenk encouraged council members to reach out to their partners in education, noting that entry-level professions, such as pharmacy tech, nursing assistant or limited x-ray operator, are in high-demand and are also shorter-term training pathways that may fit into the new expanded Pell definition.

The DWD Secretary also discussed the recently released competitive rural health care workforce grant opportunity funded by the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). Awards ranging from \$500,000 to \$10 million over four years are available to regional workforce development partners to design and implement innovative strategies to tackle their region's most pressing health care challenges.

The WHA Council on Workforce Development also discussed two opportunities to best protect the health care workforce. WHA Vice President of Government Relations Abbey Rude provided a refresher on legislation discussed at the May council meeting. Rude described the multiple staffing mandates included in legislation introduced by five Democrats at the end of the last legislative session, noting the two main components as minimum nurse to patient ratios and a prohibition on mandatory overtime for nurses. Zenk joined Rude in reviewing the rollout of this type of legislation in other states, noting that while just one of these components may be promoted as one small change, over time it often evolves into further inflexible mandates that get between nurses, nurse leaders and patients; a slippery slope that replaces nursing judgement with statewide policy.

Zenk and Rude thanked the council members who, along with members of the WHA Council on Public Policy, provided answers to a set of questions that will inform the resources and web page to guide WHA and WHA member advocacy on this important topic. Council members agreed that it is important to have an aligned voice to make legislators and the nursing and health care workforce aware of the serious issues such state mandates would create for Wisconsin's nursing workforce.

Check with WHA's Ann Zenk if you have questions or feedback about the WHA Council on Workforce Development or any other workforce issue.

IN THIS ISSUE

- President's Column: Don't Be Fooled by Headlines on Hospital Transparency
- House E&C and Senate HELP Committees Advance Price Transparency Proposals
- CMS Releases Proposed Provider Tax Rule
- Wisconsin Hospitals State PAC & Conduit Campaign Continues Strong Momentum
- WHA Submits Comments on CMS' State Directed Payment Rule
- Board of Nursing Allows Expanded Role for 4-Year RNs as Clinical Faculty
- Grant Opportunities and Slippery Slopes
- Relieve Workforce Burden – Register Today for Part 2 of the WHA WI Health Care Workforce Webinar Series
- WHA to Convene Inaugural Caring for Wisconsin's Caregivers: Workforce Well-being Summit

EDUCATION EVENTS

Jul. 27, 2026

EMTALA Regulatory Series: Part Three

Aug. 4, 2026

Seeing the Real Market: Using Claims Enhanced Intelligence to Make Better Strategy, Access, and Growth Decisions

Aug. 18, 2026

Culture College – Breakthrough Strategies for Creating and Sustaining a Magnetic Culture