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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: National Hospital Week: Healing Happens Here—and That is Worth Protecting

National Hospital Week is a time to reflect on what hospitals mean to our communities. Wisconsin's hospitals, and the dedicated providers and staff working around the clock, are essential lifelines—places where lives begin, lives are saved and people turn when they are most vulnerable.

At Wisconsin hospitals, healing happens here. That is worth celebrating, and, even more important, it is worth protecting.

Over the past year, Wisconsin State policymakers have made meaningful progress to support hospitals and the patients they serve. Lawmakers from both parties have recognized the essential role hospitals play in preserving access to care, strengthening local economies and supporting healthier communities.

One important example is the recent bipartisan passage of "Next-of-Kin" legislation, a practical reform that will help patients move more appropriately and efficiently to the care settings best suited to their recovery. Hospital emergency departments are often backed up due to patients that can't be discharged from the inpatient floor. This new law will free up inpatient capacity and reduce some of the strain our providers, staff, patients and families are feeling in emergency departments.



Kyle O'Brien



Another example is the bipartisan work done to pass a state budget with significant investments in Medicaid rates for hospitals, intended to slash hospital Medicaid losses in half and provide additional investments to sustain services. Underfunded care, like labor and delivery, behavioral health and other essential community needs largely exist because hospitals subsidize their losses. When hospitals face increased costs, these services are at risk.

Without hospitals, access to critical care like this would be very different.

Our progress with elected officials matters, and Wisconsin hospitals are grateful for the partnership that made it possible.

But our work is far from done.

Hospitals across Wisconsin continue to face financial and operational pressures. Workforce vacancy rates remain more than double pre-pandemic levels. Many hospitals, in both urban and rural communities, continue to face difficult choices about how to sustain essential services as it becomes more

difficult to become reimbursed for the provided care. Providers are spending more time navigating complicated insurance denials on the phone, rather than caring for patients at the bedside.

At the same time, demand for care is projected to rise 10% by 2040.

Solving these challenges will require continued partnership, sustained investment and thoughtful policies that reduce unnecessary legal, regulatory and payer barriers. Wisconsin's hospitals are grateful for recent progress, but sustaining access to care will require continued action.

This National Hospital Week, let us celebrate the hospital teams who show up every day for patients and families. And let us also recommit to protecting hospitals that deliver our children, treat our parents, care for our neighbors and respond around-the-clock in

moments of crisis.

At Wisconsin hospitals, healing happens here. Together, we can make sure it continues.

National Hospital Week is celebrated from May 10 through May 16, 2026.

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EDUCATION EVENTS

Jun. 8, 2026

2026 Wisconsin Rural Health Conference

Jun. 23, 2026

Rising Claims, Real Impacts: Wisconsin Hospital Risk Trends and What Leaders Can Do Now

Aug. 4, 2026

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