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Thursday, June 18, 2026

That's a Wrap: 2026 WHA Wisconsin Rural Health Conference Experiences Continued Attendance Growth



The 2026 WHA Wisconsin Rural Health Conference brought together rural hospital leaders, health care professionals, hospital board members and corporate members June 8-10 at The Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake for three days of education, networking and discussion focused on the opportunities and challenges facing rural health care.

Attendees once again took advantage of several annual conference traditions, including the golf outing, welcome reception and exhibitor showcase dinner. New additions this year—including a BBQ cooking class, complimentary headshots and WHA apparel sales—added even more opportunities for attendees to connect with colleagues and enjoy their time together.



The BBQ cooking class

Most importantly, the conference delivered timely, relevant and high-quality education for rural hospital leaders and teams. WHA extends its thanks to the many subject matter experts who shared their time, experience and insights with attendees.

Breakout sessions covered a wide range of topics important to rural hospitals, including pediatric readiness, multi-generational employee wellness, 340B updates for rural providers, caregiver empathy and well-being, energy and sustainability in rural health care, rural maternal health, Wisconsin's Rural Transformation Program and practical strategies for rural hospital success.

Featured sessions included:

The State of Health Care in Wisconsin

Kyle O'Brien, President & CEO, WHA; Tim Size, Executive Director, RWHC; Moderated by Luke Beirl, President & CEO, Tamarack Health



Tim Size, Luke Beirl, Kyle O'Brien

GenHealth: Navigating Generational Dynamics in Healthcare

Phil Gwoke, CEO Generational Expert and Thought Leader



[Read the GenHealth Recap](#)

Caring for Wisconsin's Caregivers: A Panel on Advancing Health Workforce Well-Being Across Hospital Settings

Dr. Mike Stadler, Chief Medical Officer & AHW Initiative Champion, Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin; Nadine Allen, Chief Quality Officer & WHA Initiative Sponsor, WHA; Sue Anderson, Regional President, SSM Health Wisconsin; Shawn Lerch, CEO, Sauk Prairie Health; Heather Schmidt, DO, Chief Wellness Officer, SSM Health Fond du Lac Integrative Health; Wendy Ledesma, MD, Chief Wellness Officer, Sauk Prairie Health; moderated by Dr. Stefanie Simmons, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation.



L to R: Dr. Mike Stadler, Dr. Wendy Ledesma, Nadine Allen, Sue Anderson, Dr. Heather Schmidt, Shawn Lerch, Dr. Stephanie Simmons

Read the Caregiver Well Being
Recap

Rural Health Care Today and Tomorrow: A Conversation with WHA CEO Leaders

Matt Heywood, President & CEO, Aspirus Health; Dan Rohrbach, President & CEO, Southwest Health; John Russell, President & CEO, Prairie Ridge Health; Heather Schimmers, President, Emplify Health; Moderated by Kyle O'Brien, President & CEO, WHA



L to R: Kyle O'Brien, Heather Schimmers, Dan Rohrbach, John Russell, Matt Heywood

Read the CEO Panel Recap

Culture by Design: Transforming Workplaces One Brain Pattern Interrupt at a Time

Paul Long, Leadership and Culture Expert



Paul Long

Read the Culture by Design
Recap

WHA thanks the 322 member attendees, 58 exhibitors and 13 sponsors who helped make this year's conference a success. WHA is especially grateful to the sponsors whose support helps make this annual event possible and strengthens opportunities for rural hospital leaders and partners to learn, connect and collaborate.

THANK YOU CONFERENCE SPONSORS

THANK YOU GOLF & COOKING CLASS SPONSORS

SAVE THE DATE

The 2027 WHA Wisconsin Rural Health Conference will be held **Wednesday, June 9 – Friday, June 11** at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells.

IN THIS ISSUE

- WHA CEO Leaders Discuss the Future of Rural Health Care at Wisconsin Rural Health Conference
- That's a Wrap: 2026 WHA Wisconsin Rural Health Conference Experiences Continued Attendance Growth
- Rural Conference Keynote Offers Insight into Multi-Generational Workforce
- Rural Health Conference: A Panel on Advancing Health Workforce Well-Being Across Hospital Settings
- Rural Conference Closer Brings Energy, Humor and Insight to Group
- Rural Health Transformation Grant Opportunities Now Open for Wisconsin Hospitals, Rural Health Clinics and Other Providers
- 2026 WHA Health Care Leadership Academy Graduates Ten New Leaders
- Ten Quality Improvement Leaders Complete Wisconsin Quality Residency Program

EDUCATION EVENTS

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

Sep. 10, 2026

Caring for Wisconsin's Caregivers: 2026 WHA Healthcare Workforce Well-being Summit