

Vol. 69, Issue 28

Thursday, July 10, 2025

President's Column: State Budget Will Have Lasting Impact on Access to Health Care

At the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA), we often say that good health care policy makes good politics. Never has that been more evident than last week, when state lawmakers raced against a loudly ticking Congressional clock to ensure Wisconsin could provide \$740 million in increased Medicaid payments to hospitals.

If the governor and the Legislature had acted a day late, Wisconsin would have been far more than a dollar short. Hospitals would have lost out on the \$740 million in increased Medicaid payments that will be used to improve access to care, invest in providers and enhance critical health care infrastructure. And the state would have lost out on another \$300 million to fund the Medicaid program.

But they didn't. Lawmakers in Madison came together, Republicans and Democrats, to pass a state budget that allowed Wisconsin to maximize its state-directed payment program (i.e. hospital assessment), like most other states in the country.

This outcome was anything but certain. To be honest, it felt doomed in early June when budget negotiations broke down between Governor Tony Evers and Republican leaders.



Kyle O'Brien

“ Last week's budget vote may go down as one of the most important actions the state has ever taken to provide necessary resources to hospitals across Wisconsin. And they did it, against many odds.

Kyle O'Brien

When the news broke that negotiations fell apart, WHA immediately called on lawmakers to come back to the negotiating table. To their credit, they did.

For some, it may have been politically easier to sit back and blame the other side of the aisle for inaction. But that's not what happened.

What you saw in Madison last week is a government that worked.

According to WHA's most recent financial data, one-third of hospitals have negative operating margins as government payer-mixes creep up with an aging population and commercial reimbursement rates fall short of the ever-increasing cost to deliver care. While two hospital closures in the Chippewa Valley grabbed headlines, there were concerning trends across the industry that necessitated decisive action by lawmakers.

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Kyle O'Brien

WHA was honored to work alongside the governor, legislative leaders and lawmakers from both parties who made this possible, including their staff and non-partisan legislative service agencies that were drafting last-minute amendments to the budget bill through the night.

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For the first time in modern history, a state budget was passed by both houses of the Legislature and signed by the governor in less than 24 hours. Their responsiveness to our call will undoubtedly help stabilize and improve health care in rural and urban communities across Wisconsin. They deserve credit for their action.

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Kyle O'Brien Begins Tenure as WHA President and CEO

Kyle O'Brien has officially assumed the role of Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) President and CEO, effective July 1, 2025. O'Brien succeeds Eric Borgerding, who retired on June 30 after 27 years of service to WHA, including the past 10 years as president and CEO. Borgerding will continue to serve in an advisory capacity through the end of the year.

O'Brien has more than a decade of experience at WHA, most recently serving as senior vice president of government relations. Since joining WHA in 2012, he has led the organization's advocacy strategy, played a key role in shaping public policy and contributed to WHA's operational and strategic direction.

"This transition represents a continuation of WHA's strong leadership and commitment to serving Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems," said WHA Board Chair Dr. Jeff Bahr, chief physician executive, Aurora Health Care. "Kyle's knowledge of the issues facing health care, his experience working with state and federal policymakers and his deep understanding of WHA's mission position him well to lead the organization into the future."

"I'm honored to take on this role and to continue WHA's mission of advocating for accessible, high-quality health care in Wisconsin," said O'Brien. "It's a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team and with our members who are making a real difference in their communities every day."

O'Brien is the seventh individual to serve as WHA president and CEO in the association's 105-year history.

For more information on the leadership transition, see the announcement press release [here](#).



Kyle O'Brien

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Christian Moran Joins WHA as Senior Director of Medicaid & Payer Reimbursement Policy

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) is pleased to welcome Christian Moran, who joined the organization on June 9 as Senior Director of Medicaid & Payer Reimbursement Policy.

Moran brings more than a decade of experience in Medicaid policy and public service to his new role. His career includes serving in multiple roles within the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Medicaid program, as well as working in the state legislature, including on the influential Joint Finance Committee.

Most recently, Moran was director of the bureau of programs and policy at DHS, where he oversaw strategic direction and overall management of Medicaid managed care programs spanning both acute and long-term care. His previous roles at DHS include deputy director for the bureau of systems management, section manager for claims operations and section manager for hospital rate setting and policy in the Bureau of Fiscal Management.

"Christian's deep knowledge of Wisconsin's Medicaid program and extensive experience in reimbursement policy make him an incredible asset to WHA and our members," said WHA President and CEO Kyle O'Brien. "He's joining the team at a critical time for Medicaid and payer reimbursement policy, and we are excited to have his leadership as we navigate these important issues."



Christian Moran

Moran holds two master's degrees — one in media studies from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and another in public affairs from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs.

"I'm excited to join the talented team at WHA and to continue working on policy issues that have a direct impact on the health care system in Wisconsin," said Moran. "WHA's work on behalf of hospitals and the patients they serve is more important than ever and I'm honored to be part of it."

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Preventing Violence, Promoting Resilience: Hospital-Based Behavioral Safety Interventions Webinar Series

This webinar series showcases three Wisconsin hospitals, each offering a unique perspective on workplace violence prevention and/or Behavioral Response Team (BRT) implementation via their own webinar within the series. Incorporating these diverse presentations will create a focused and engaging series that highlights different approaches and real-world impact. For more information, see WHA Quality Events page. To register, [click here](#).

Webinar 1: Mayo Clinic Health System - Eau Claire

Title: Designing Safer Systems: Behavioral Safety Planning through DMAIC and Shared Governance

When: July 17, 2025, 12 - 1 p.m.

This session will provide a strategic overview of a multidisciplinary project aimed at reducing physical assault with injury against health care staff, improving both patient and staff safety, while lowering institutional costs. Attendees will explore how collaborative efforts across disciplines, including physicians, nursing, administration and operations, can drive meaningful change.

Webinar 2: Mercyhealth Hospital and Trauma Center - Janesville

Title: Reducing Workplace Violence Through Violence Risk Screening and Meaningful Interventions

When: July 31, 2025, 12 - 1 p.m.

The Mercyhealth team developed a targeted documentation tool to empower bedside staff to accurately record episodes of patient violence within the medical record. Alongside this, we implemented a violence risk screening tool embedded with meaningful interventions aimed at proactively identifying high-risk patients. This initiative supports staff safety, enhances leadership and security involvement and fosters a culture where safety is a top priority. By improving reporting practices, we aim to reduce incidents of workplace violence and better protect our health care teams.

Webinar 3: ThedaCare

Title: Development and Implementation of a Workplace Violence Prevention Program by Focusing on Collaboration and Team Member Preparation

When: August 14, 2025, 12 - 1 p.m.

ThedaCare is committed to providing high-quality, comprehensive care for our communities. The health care system is also committed to the safety of patients, visitors and team members. With trends of increasing Workplace Violence (WPV) episodes directed at health care personnel, ThedaCare leaders developed a Workplace Violence Prevention framework and program to better prepare team members to identify and respond to potential workplace violence situations. This session will highlight how this framework and program was implemented at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center–Neenah.

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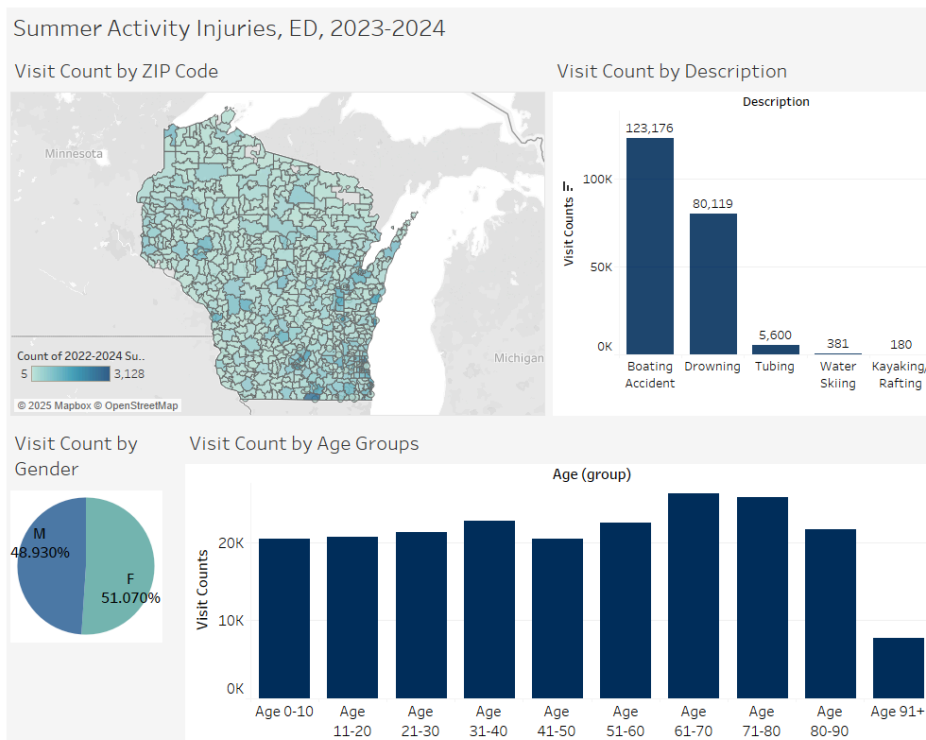
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Fast Facts from the WHA Information Center: Summertime Injuries

Everyone knows that summertime in Wisconsin is one of the best seasons, bringing great weather and longer days. Outdoor activities like barbecuing, spending time in the pool or boating on the lake become common activities on the weekends.

With more time spent outside comes an increased risk of injury. Kaiser Permanente conducted a study which found a 15-27% increase in visits to the emergency room department between Memorial Day and Labor Day. In 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard reported 3,887 boating incidents that resulted in 556 deaths, 2,170 injuries and \$88 million in property damage. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) found that between June and August 2023, nearly one million children visited the emergency room.



The WHA Information Center analyzed emergency department claims data from January 2023- December 2024 to look at demographics and locations of patients who presented for summer activity injuries. The summer activities analyzed included boating accidents, drowning, tubing, water skiing and kayaking/rafting. Boating accidents saw the highest number of emergency room visits when compared to the other summer activities, followed by drowning. When analyzing gender, approximately 4,000 more females were seen. The average age of patients visiting the ER for a summer injury was 47 years old. The percentage of visits seen by age group is evenly divided from 0 to 90. This means that no matter your age, summer accidents can happen.

Below are some tips to safely enjoy summer activities from the National Safety Council:

- **Boating:** Life jackets are at the core of safe boating, whether using a motorized or non-motorized vessel. The U.S. Coast Guard reports 81% of boating deaths in 2021 were due to drowning and 83% of the victims were not wearing a life jacket. Get licensed by taking the National Association of Boating Law Administrators Safety Course. Do not drink and boat as this can cause inhibitions in the driver, leading to accidents and injuries. Pay attention to weather forecasts before heading out on the water to avoid getting caught in bad weather. Lastly, know and understand boating rules/regulations before going.
- **Swimming safety:** Make sure to never swim alone, avoid dangerous swimming locations and risky conditions and learn basic swimming and water safety.

- **Beat the heat and rays:** Heat kills more than 600 people in the United States each year. Preventing heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke and heat exhaustion, is important for people of all ages, but extreme heat poses the greatest risk for people under age 4 and over 65. The best ways to protect yourself from heat include staying cool, hydrated and informed: find air conditioning during hot hours and wear cool clothing, drink plenty of liquids and pay attention to heat advisories.
- **Safety tips for water skiers, tubers and wakeboarders:** Skiing, tubing and wakeboarding are popular water sports, but they can also be dangerous with participants traveling at high speeds. Learn how to get up out of the water and how to safely use the tow rope. Always have a spotter in the boat and go over basic hand signals. Make certain the towline is not caught in the propeller or wrapped around you prior to beginning. Wait for the propeller to stop before getting back on the boat. Enjoy these activities during daylight hours only.

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