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**WISCONSIN HOSPITALS CARE:**  
Helping Communities Thrive



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## WISCONSIN HOSPITALS CARE: HELPING COMMUNITIES THRIVE

A Message from WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding



Wisconsin hospitals and health systems provide high-quality health care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but their work goes well beyond the hospital walls. As mainstays of the community, nonprofit hospitals are not only dedicated to helping patients in the hospital, but also helping the community thrive, seeking ways to support the overall health and well-being of the people they are proud to serve.

Despite the ongoing strain of the pandemic in 2021, Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems maintained strong community involvement. As new challenges arose and the needs of communities evolved, Wisconsin health care providers were there to help in all aspects of people's lives from free health care to transportation to food insecurity and career pathways. They don't do this because they have to, they do this because they want to and need to—because they recognize Wisconsin hospitals are cornerstones of their communities.

This year's report includes examples of programs and initiatives that illustrates how as our state grappled with the lingering conditions of the pandemic and the aftereffects on our communities. Providing free care and other hospital-supported initiatives remained a top priority. At the same time, the strain of the pandemic has revealed historic challenges for Wisconsin's health care workforce. Hospitals and health systems have deployed significant investments of time and resources to address these workforce-related challenges. Despite our members' best efforts, challenges remain and will be a top priority for us to address in the coming year.

Through numerous programs and initiatives, Wisconsin hospitals and health systems contributed nearly **nearly \$2 billion** in community benefits and charity care in fiscal year 2021. This report highlights just some of the many ways hospitals supported their communities. Our hospitals, their staff and volunteers understand their role as sometimes the only safety net available to the community, and they embrace it. We are proud to share their stories.

We are also reminded through these stories that hospitals are there for people when no one else is. When a service isn't profitable in the free market, hospitals are still asked to provide it. They do that every day for more than 1.5 million people on the state Medicaid program, which pays hospitals only 65 cents for every dollar it costs to care for the patient—amounting to an annual loss of \$1.1 billion. And they do that every day for those without insurance, when no one else will provide them care.

Organized by region, you can find and learn more about the specific initiatives taking place in your own communities. I invite you to share these inspiring stories with others. As we have done in the past, an interactive, online version of the report is available on our website, and we'll be highlighting various stories on our social media pages. Visit [wha.org/communitybenefits](https://wha.org/communitybenefits) to learn more.

Wisconsin's health care providers have an unwavering commitment to serving the community in more ways than just patient care. A very special thank you to our members who step up every day and go above and beyond in providing high-quality, affordable and accessible health care services supporting thriving communities all across our state.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Borgerding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small flourish at the end.

Eric Borgerding,  
WHA President/CEO

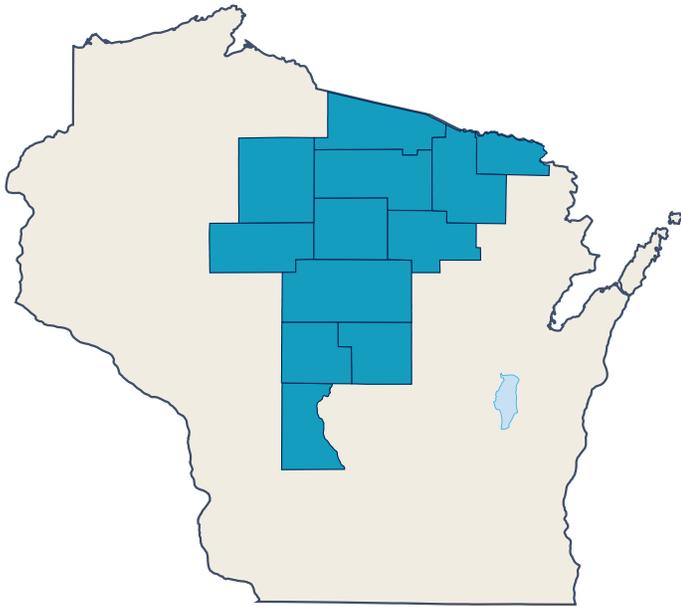
## Community Benefit Fiscal Year 2021 Financial Summary

Community Benefits	
Charity Care at Cost	\$143,588,257
Medicaid Shortfalls	\$1,189,612,433
Losses on Other Public Programs	\$47,730,380
Subsidized Health Services	\$167,071,778
Nursing Home Losses	\$8,106,412

Benefit Category	
Community Health Improvement Services	
<i>Community Health Education</i>	\$27,529,406
<i>Community-Based Clinical Services</i>	\$9,178,460
<i>Health Care Support Services</i>	\$28,088,186
<i>Social &amp; Environmental Improvement Activities</i>	\$4,725,922
Total Community Health Improvement Services	\$69,521,974
Cash or In-Kind Donations	\$36,065,142
Loss on Health Professions Education/Workforce	\$275,731,395
Loss on Research	\$16,142,163
Community Building Activities	\$7,337,063
Community Benefit Operations	\$7,955,624
<b>Total Community Benefits*</b>	<b>\$1,968,862,621</b>

\* WHA follows CHA Community Benefit Guidelines, which excludes Medicare shortfalls and bad debt expense from the community benefit calculation. In fiscal year 2021, the statewide estimate for Medicare shortfalls was \$2,530,405,238 and bad debt at cost was \$244,422,604.

# North Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$91,597,098**

## Charity Care

### Mile Bluff Assists Uninsured, Underinsured Community Members

Covering the cost of health care can be a challenge. Whether it's a family going through a tough time, or a young adult just getting started in a career, paying medical bills can be difficult—especially with little or no health insurance coverage. Times like this call for a little outside help, and Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston has a team of specialists who are ready to answer these calls for help.

During the 2021 fiscal year, the organization's charity care program provided assistance to 131 individuals, forgiving over \$327,000 in medical debt! Not only do Mile Bluff's team members connect patients with financial support, but they also walk patients through the sometimes-difficult process of getting health insurance coverage. One thankful parent expressed gratitude to the team, saying: "We really appreciate all the help getting health insurance for our son, who is currently in college and soon will fall off our insurance. You went above and beyond."

This is just one of the many examples of Mile Bluff's commitment to the community.

**Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston**

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Mile Bluff's Team Provides Stability for Community During Pandemic

This past year delivered some significant challenges for Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston—including the continuation of a global pandemic and a tornado touchdown on the main campus. Despite these difficulties, Mile Bluff didn't miss a beat. Through it all, the organization maintained jobs for hundreds of area residents and continued to provide the high-quality services it's come to be known for.

At the peak of the pandemic, hospitals across the state were full. Without the ability to transfer extremely sick patients to facilities that provide higher levels of care, more was demanded of the staff at rural hospitals like Mile Bluff. Even with this influx of sicker patients, and significant recruiting challenges, the organization never stopped safely serving the community. In fact, the efforts of the staff earned national recognition for safety this past year.



*Mile Bluff didn't let the pandemic or a tornado get in its way of providing safe, high-quality care.*

Mile Bluff's team faced these recent trials with poise, strength, compassion and excellence—and did so under the direction of an entirely new executive leadership group.

At the end of the day, and in the middle of very uncertain times, area residents could be very certain that when medical care was needed, Mile Bluff would be there for them.

**Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston**

## COVID-19 Hotline Ensures Access to Reliable Information and Health Services

Ensuring access to reliable information and health services is vital for any health care organization during a public health emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted swift actions by Marshfield Clinic Health System (MCHS) to set up a COVID-19 hotline for the community to have access to the most timely and accurate information about the pandemic as it unfolded. Initially, patients utilized the hotline to ask questions at a time of high uncertainty and to obtain information to feel safe and learn how to best protect themselves and their families.

As the pandemic progressed, this hotline became the hub for patients to request COVID-19 testing and was partnered with MCHS's nurse line to seamlessly serve the needs of all patients. As availability of the COVID-19 vaccine grew closer, it became clear that a separate approach was needed for vaccine scheduling. A survey was created for both health system workers and the community to request vaccines. The clinical quality coordinators that manned the COVID-19 hotline were integral in helping health system employees and patients navigate through the survey and scheduling process. They collaborated with several departments across the system to ensure timely access to the vaccines, while also maintaining the hotline's testing requests.

While many individuals and departments worked in partnership with one another to optimize resources for MCHS to meet the needs of our community, the clinical quality coordinators of MCHS were critical to its success as the first line contact with our community.

[Marshfield Medical Center, Marshfield](#)

### *Health Equity*

## Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua Supports Home in a Backpack Program

Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua supported the Home in a Backpack program with an investment of \$500 to support children who are food insecure by providing nutritional food outside of school hours.

Backpack food programs help to provide nutritious, non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food to children to ensure kids have enough nutritious food on weekends and holidays, helping to avoid hunger when kids can't depend on school meals. In the Minocqua region, the program serves the four local elementary school districts. Over the last year, this program has served approximately 71 families and 176 children through the 2021-2022 school year. The program has had so much success that two of these schools offer

this program during the summer months. MMC-Minocqua's donation purchased non-perishable food items for breakfast, lunches, snacks and backpacks to help distribute the food items.

Volunteers help to pack the backpacks, distribute them to the local school districts, and then teachers distribute the backpacks for the children to bring home. The children bring the backpack back to school to be filled again for the following week. The program is made possible through the collective efforts of local area organizations in the local community.

[Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua](#)

## Marshfield Medical Center-Park Falls Participates in Northwoods Tobacco Free Coalition

Marshfield Medical Center-Park Falls and Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua participated in a health equity assessment for the Northwoods Tobacco Free Coalition, a tobacco control and prevention coalition serving Oneida, Vilas, Forest, Florence, Price, Marinette, and Lincoln counties. Together these seven counties work to address tobacco-related health concerns within the community. Tobacco prevention and control alliances are required to integrate three health equity competencies and activities into a scope of work. The coalition members completed a survey to help determine what health equity focus areas activities were the highest priority in these counties for 2023. This group focuses on outreach and education to local and state leaders; addressing dangers of other tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes, smoke-free air in multi-unit housing; works with local youth to conduct peer-to-peer education; addresses tobacco-related disparities within the community; and provides Wisconsin WINS tobacco compliance checks.

[Marshfield Medical Center-Park Falls](#)

## Senior Stock Box Program Aids Portage County Residents in Need

Marshfield Medical Center-River Region at Stevens Point donated \$2,000 to Central Rivers Farmshed, a non-profit that partners with small farms and food businesses, to supplement the monthly Senior Stock Box program with fresh, local nutritious food.

The Senior Stock Box is a program of the Hunger Task Force, a free and local food bank based in West Milwaukee, that provides a monthly box of healthy food to low-income seniors free of charge. Boxes include staples like cereal, milk, canned veggies, fruit, meats, rice, fruit juice, and two pounds of fresh

Wisconsin cheese. The Hunger Task Force partners with local agencies to coordinate the program. The Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Portage County, UW-Madison Division of Extension, FoodWise, Central Rivers Farmshed, Curbwise LLC bicycle delivery service, and the Stevens Point Housing Authority brought the program to the area in 2021.

Marshfield Clinic Health System joined the effort in April 2022 with funding to support the addition of local eggs, greens, and fresh and freshly frozen vegetables from Farmshed. More than 50 boxes are distributed monthly with five to 10 new recipients each month. Seniors unable to pick up a box at the ADRC of Portage County have boxes delivered by Curbwise LLC to an average of 16 people per month. In the first three months of adding fresh local food, the following were distributed:

- More than 240 pounds of fresh vegetables
- More than 150 pounds of freshly frozen vegetables
- Approximately 90 dozen local eggs

Early survey results show that the highlight of the Senior Stock Box program is the addition of local foods and participants report the fresh food is filling a significant gap in their diets.

[Marshfield Medical Center-Stevens Point](#)

## Hospital-Supported Initiatives

### Reimbursement Program Helps Seniors Access Exercise Programs in Medford

A pilot program funded by Aspirus Medford Hospital is providing increased access to exercise programs for older adults in Taylor County.

Aspirus Therapy & Fitness-Medford is providing monthly membership reimbursements to older adults that qualify and meet monthly usage requirements.

“We wanted to remove the biggest barriers of cost, access and accountability that were restricting our senior populations from staying active,” said Jake Brehm, Aspirus therapy & fitness director in Medford. “This program offers opportunity for our seniors to exercise in a safe, clean, environment while adding an accountability component to eliminate cost. Our mission is to provide high-quality fitness programs for members to achieve their optimal health and maintain an active lifestyle.”

The program encourages regular exercise for those 65 and older and provides an opportunity for a full reimbursement of their membership at month's end if they utilize the facility eight times per month.

Included in Senior memberships are several classes that encourage safe and effective exercise for populations at all levels and abilities.

[Aspirus Medford Hospital, Medford](#)

### Merrill Effort to Provide Free Flu Vaccines and a Meal Expands

For the last three years, members of the Merrill community had the opportunity to protect themselves and their community as well as receiving a free meal thanks to the staff at Aspirus Merrill Hospital.



What originally started three years ago as a targeted effort to increase access to flu shots to the Merrill community, the one-day event has thrived through the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting to a drive-through delivery model that in total has provided more than 500 free flu shots and approximately 1,500 meals to the Merrill community over the life of the program.

“We are extremely proud to be able to provide this service to the Merrill community,” says Jane Bentz, Aspirus Merrill Hospital Foundation and Community Outreach Director.

Attendees not only get a free flu shot, but a free meal specially prepared by nutrition services staff at Aspirus Merrill Hospital. Popular favorites like spaghetti and meatballs, beef tips and gravy and turkey with all the fixings have proved popular with participations.

In addition to adapting to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the event has grown to include a partnership with the Hmong and Hispanic Communication Network Project (H2N). H2N collaborates with public health organizations, health systems, resource agencies, and community organizations to provide Hmong and Hispanic communities with resources and tools to better withstand the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional flu vaccines were secured by Aspirus Merrill Hospital to help H2N provide a pop-up clinic for the Hispanic population in Merrill.

Since May 2020, H2N clinics and outreach efforts in north central Wisconsin have provided over 1,000 people with COVID-19 vaccines, over 500 people with flu vaccines, and thousands with COVID-19 resources in their own language. Community members are also encouraged to share their concerns and ideas, which allows H2N to better understand and serve these communities.

[Aspirus Merrill Hospital, Merrill](#)

## Aspirus Health Expands Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program

The perfect place to find fresh food is at your local farmer's market. From farm to table, the produce is one of the healthiest ways to get all your nutrients.

Now in its sixth year, Aspirus Health expanded its Fruit and Vegetable Prescription (FVRx) Program to include 13 farmers market locations in Wisconsin and six in the upper peninsula of Michigan as part of a systemwide effort to provide patients with access to fresh produce.



*Aspirus Wausau Hospital's Farmers Market.*

Patients are identified by the Patient-Centered Medical Home team and Health Resource Team as having a need, whether it be food insecurity, low income, chronic conditions, or lack of access. Eligible patients are given a "prescription" to use at one of many participating farmers' markets in the Aspirus service area.

"We know that a diet rich in fruits and veggies is healthy for us, but not everyone has the same access to these items," says Diane Hinrichs Kelbel, RD, CD, registered dietician at Aspirus. "This program is designed to get more nutritious foods in the hands of more families in our communities."

When a FVRx is provided, participants get access to information on how to buy, store and consume local produce; tips and strategies for eating more fruits and veggies; as well as tokens to be used for purchase at participating farmers' markets.

Aspirus hospitals in Wisconsin that participate in the FVRx program include: Aspirus Riverview Hospital, Wisconsin Rapids; Aspirus Langlade Hospital, Antigo; Aspirus Medford Hospital; Aspirus Merrill Hospital; Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital, Portage; Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital; Aspirus Plover Hospital; Aspirus Wausau Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital.

[Aspirus Health](#)

## Northwoods Community Sticker Campaign Highlights New Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Mental health advocates are celebrating the launch of the of the 988 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline which provides 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental health and substance abuse related distress.

As members of the Northwood's Community, Outreach, Prevention, and Education (COPE) Coalition, Aspirus Eagle River Hospital, Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital and Howard Young Medical Center, Woodruff is helping raise awareness of 988 with a community sticker campaign.

Nearly 30 businesses, school districts and organizations in Forest, Oneida and Vilas counties are part of a campaign to connect people who may have thoughts or know someone who has thoughts of suicide with resources to get help.

"Suicide is connected with tremendous grief and loss that affects individuals, families, and communities. Suicide is also a complex issue that involves many factors that can increase risk factors," stated Jason Dailey, Oneida County Assistant Veterans' Service Officer and creator of the 988-sticker used in this campaign. "This is why the coalition feels that sharing the 988 number is so important."

It's also important to be aware of the differences between risk factors and warning signs to help someone who may be thinking about suicide or has a plan in place.

"People might not be comfortable asking the question or getting the person the help they may need, but they could help connect them to someone they trust. This may be a pastor or priest, their health care provider, a mental health provider or a close family member or friend," added Heidi Pritzl, a licensed clinical social worker with Aspirus

Koller Behavioral Health. “Sometimes making that first moment of contact can be difficult, especially if it’s to get professional help, but a simple offer to help to connect in whatever way you’re comfortable can make the difference.”



Northwoods COPE addresses mental health and substance use concerns in Forest, Oneida, and Vilas counties. The group is made up of community partners that include school districts, health care, private mental health providers, veteran’s services, local health departments, and UW-Extension.

[Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital; Aspirus Eagle River Hospital; Howard Young Medical Center, Woodruff](#)

## Aspirus Health Breast Milk Program Helps Feed Babies

The Aspirus Breast Milk donation program at the Aspirus Wausau Hospital (AWH) and Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital (ASP) depots have collected a total of over 11,000 pounds of donated milk in the program’s nine years. That’s nearly 1,318 gallons of milk.

AWH and ASP serve as depot centers for The Mother’s Milk Bank of the Western Great Lakes, a certified breast milk bank located near Chicago. For convenience to donating mothers throughout the state of Wisconsin, there are 13 drop-off sites located across the Aspirus Health system where mothers can donate their breast milk.



*Chris Bletsoe, Aspirus Care Coordination Navigator*

“Women who are breastfeeding may have an overabundance of milk and for a variety of reasons might not use all of their milk,” said Aspirus Care Coordination Navigator Chris Bletsoe, RN. “Under typical circumstances, programs such as ours are a way to capture excess breast milk for sick and

premature babies who could benefit from the immunological properties of breast milk. However, the current baby formula shortage has created a higher demand in healthy babies. We’re proud that this program can support those families too and encourage any mothers interested in donating their breast milk to consider doing so.”

Mothers interested in becoming donors are screened for eligibility using a variety of health history and lifestyle questions. Donors are given lab tests to screen for any potential infections. The mother can begin donating milk once she clears the screening process.

Families of healthy babies that need a short-term emergency supply of donor milk due to formula unavailability can find the nearest donor milk dispensary to purchase up to 40 oz of donor milk.

[Aspirus Wausau Hospital and Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital](#)

## Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam Launches Community Health Grant Program

Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam launched a Community Health Grant Program as part of the hospital’s efforts for community benefit and health and well-being. The program provides local not-for-profit organizations with up to \$10,000 to develop new ideas or enhance existing projects that improve the health of Dodge County area residents.

The program was developed in response to Marshfield Medical Center–Beaver Dam’s most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for Dodge County. The assessment identified alcohol and substance use prevention, behavioral health, chronic disease prevention, and social determinants of health (the physical, social, and economic environment that influence a person’s ability to be healthy) as priority health concerns.

“We believe that engaged, community well-being work is best performed by those closest to the issues,” said Angelia Foster, Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam president. “As we align our organizational community health efforts with the health concerns identified in the Community Health Needs Assessment, one way to begin efficiently addressing these issues is to provide funds to our local partners.”

Six community-based organizations received funding for a variety of projects, including starting a children’s grief support group, stocking personal care items at a food pantry, mentoring and tutoring youth, and offering parenting classes.

“We have had tremendous success in the past two months,” one recipient reported. “Our parenting seminars, one-on-one parent education, and restoration workshop have proven to be a huge asset to our program participants.”

The Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam Community Health Grant was offered in 2021 and 2022 with hopes to offer the grant in future years.

[Marshfield Medical Center-Beaver Dam](#)

## Annual Conference Helps Local Youth Thrive

The Vilas County Youth Coalition works with Northwoods Coalition, a program of Marshfield Clinic Health System, and other local agencies to host the annual “Positive Alternatives Conference” to give sixth and seventh graders the opportunity to learn, collaborate, make new friends and have fun.

The conference hosts over 200 students and is the only event that draws students together from four different schools representing 12 towns in two counties. These students will eventually become classmates when they move on to high school. The goal of the conference is to introduce students



to local resources and provide experiences that help them thrive. Seven different sessions are offered, which include information about outdoor skills, healthy

relationships, impacts of substance use, Native American cultural activities, teambuilding opportunities and more.

Seventy percent of youth attendees rated the sessions as “Good” or “Excellent.” The most highly rated sessions included “Cultural Connection & Awareness,” “Outdoor Education with the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission,” and the team building sessions.

By encouraging collaborative learning across the school districts, students learn how to work together and often leave with a new friend or two. As one sixth-grader put it, “You never know who you can be friends with.”

### Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua

## Beyond Health Care – Mile Bluff Improves Access to Food for Area Residents

One of the priorities identified in the 2021 community health needs assessment for Juneau County was access to affordable healthy foods. While a café is just a small service offered by Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston, team members knew that together they could help meet this need in big ways.

Despite the ongoing strain of the pandemic, Mile Bluff and its employees consistently gave back to the people around them. They went above and beyond the call of duty by providing financial support, volunteering their time, and donating needed items throughout their service area.

Some of Mile Bluff’s recent initiatives:

- Employees donated more than 650 pounds of food to local pantries, including meat purchased by the hospital.
- Mile Bluff and its retail pharmacies financially supported a community sharing supper event, where employees braved the cold temperatures to hand out meals.
- Spurred on by the hospital’s donation, staff members pitched in to raise a combined total of almost \$4,000 to benefit area food pantries. This was in partnership with a local realtor and radio station.
- With beef purchased by the hospital, Mile Bluff held free beef give-away events in a number of towns. Anyone who came while supplies lasted could receive free steak, ribs, roasts, etc.

Mile Bluff and its team members are proud to impact the community both inside the walls of the organization and beyond.

### Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston



Mile Bluff gave away free beef to area residents.

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### Aspirus Health Launches Project SEARCH Program in Rhinelander

Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital is the newest location in Wisconsin to be selected as a business partner for Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH is a unique, one year business-led, school-to-work program that involves total workplace immersion by combining classroom instruction, career exploration and hands-on training for students with disabilities.



Project SEARCH interns

Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital's Project SEARCH program features three 10-week rotations where participant interns receive real-life work experience that provides them with the skills they need to obtain a job and succeed in Wisconsin's workforce upon their graduation. Students will support departments across the hospital and clinic including Dietary, Housekeeping, Radiology, Primary Care, Specialty Clinics and Behavioral Health.

"Project SEARCH relies on local collaboration to provide staff and resources to help interns in the program achieve their goals," said Jess Gaedtke, director, Aspirus Medical Group. "We're honored to partner with the program and interns to give them the experience they need to obtain a meaningful job upon graduation."

As the business partner, Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital provides a training room with computer access for the interns who are led by a Skills Trainer as they establish individual education plans for participants who will spend four to five hours on the job each day. Seven students joined the program this year.

"The ultimate goal upon program completion is for participants to obtain competitive employment utilizing the

job skills learned on the internships and throughout the program," said Rod Olson, Project SEARCH Instructor. "Many of our former interns are working in health care and business settings across the Northwoods."

Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital is the 30th Project SEARCH location in Wisconsin and joins Aspirus Wausau Hospital and Aspirus Riverview Hospital in Wisconsin Rapids as Aspirus facilities in the international program which helps educational institutes partner directly with businesses in the community and provide internships for students.

[Aspirus Rhinelander Hospital, Rhinelander](#)

### Aspirus Offers New Paid CNA Training Program

Aspirus Riverview Hospital in Wisconsin Rapids and Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital have partnered with Mid-State Technical College to offer a paid Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Training Program.

The accelerated program allows participants to receive the education and experience needed to become a CNA, with added financial support to help guarantee success.

When accepted into the program, participants receive paid tuition, course materials, scrubs, and a stipend that will allow them to dedicate full-time attention to training for their new career.

"Because CNAs play such a critical part of quality health care, Aspirus sees this as an investment in the health of our community," said Aspirus Talent Delivery Partner Brooke Pliska.

"CNAs do such meaningful work, interacting directly with patients and aiding them with daily living activities."

Class enrollment is limited to eight individuals per session. Once an individual has completed classes, a clinical rotation, and certification exams, they will be offered a full-time or part-time CNA position within the Aspirus system.

"We encourage anyone who is interested in starting a career in health care to explore this unique opportunity," Pliska said.

[Aspirus Riverview Hospital, Wisconsin Rapids and Aspirus Stevens Point Hospital](#)



Landyn Schroeder, Aspirus Float Pool CNA

## New Pharmacy Graduates Begin Aspirus Pharmacy Residency Program

Every year Aspirus Wausau Hospital (AWH) offers new pharmacists the opportunity to participate in the Aspirus Postgraduate Year One (PGY1) pharmacy residency program, accredited by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (AHSP).

Since 1999, this program has supported the careers of many pharmacists by offering extended training and practical knowledge.

AWH provides residents with a broad range of clinical experiences with a focus on inpatient acute care, drug information and practice management. Through pharmacist-directed protocols, residents gain experience managing parenteral nutrition, insulin, antibiotics and anticoagulation.

“This program is a great opportunity for recent pharmacy graduates to apply the knowledge they gained in school to real world scenarios while having guidance from an experienced pharmacist. Throughout rotations, the residents are introduced to complex patients and are allowed the opportunity to explore different areas of pharmacy that are not necessarily discussed in school,” said Aspirus Pharmacy Residency Program Director Stacy Schoepke.



L to R: Aspirus Pharmacy Residents Megan Fleischman, Allyson Balthazor and Andrea Modlin

The progressive and clinically oriented pharmacy at AWH consists of an inpatient pharmacy, a clinic pharmacy, and an ambulatory oncology center pharmacy.

In addition, Aspirus utilizes a state-of-the-art clean room, compounding robot, automated dispensing cabinets and smart infusion pumps.

Pharmacists work collaboratively and round with the health care team in a variety of patient care areas where they practice at the top of their license. The pharmacy preceptor team includes board certified and residency trained pharmacists, with many having over 10 years of experience. In the past five years, Aspirus has been able to retain 65% of its resident graduates within the Aspirus System due to the expanding pharmacy department and progressive patient care services offered by pharmacists.

Those eligible for the Aspirus PGY1 pharmacy residency program must have all the following:

- Enrollment in the ASHP Residency Match Program.
- Doctor of Pharmacy degree from an accredited school or college of pharmacy.
- Eligible for pharmacist licensure in the state of Wisconsin.

[Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Wausau](#)

## Marshfield Clinic Health System’s Workforce Development Collaboration

Marshfield Clinic Health System’s Division of Education and Human Resources has been working on a variety of opportunities to support their employees and community members with interest in entering and advancing their careers in health care. Through this work, Marshfield Medical Center has brought together several technical colleges (Mid-State Technical College, Nicolet Technical College, Northwood Technical College, Moraine Park Technical College and Chippewa Valley Technical College) and has been awarded the DHS Allied Health Professionals Grant to help promote and support a variety of health professions. The goal of the grant is to increase the availability of quality education and training opportunities for critical allied health positions in rural areas of the state. The grant funds will focus on the following professions throughout our rural service areas: certified nursing assistants, medical assistants, EMT/paramedics, surgical technologists, respiratory therapists and phlebotomists.

The funding is estimated to assist nearly 50 individuals on their path to a health care career. Additionally, this collaboration between technical schools has helped strengthen Marshfield Medical Center’s partnerships and offerings for students and employees. In addition to this consortium grant, Marshfield Medical Center has partnered with MSTC to also offer a Workforce Advancement Training grant for its current workforce interested in becoming medical assistants and certified nursing assistants. Through this grant, Marshfield Medical Center will support 24 employees through three core classes for the medical assistant role as well as help six employees complete the certified nursing assistant program.

[Marshfield Clinic Health System, Marshfield](#)

## Positive Employee Culture + Competitive Wages = A Strong Mile Bluff Workforce

Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston recognizes that in order to best impact the members of the community, efforts need to be made to positively impact the members of the team. That is why employee culture, compensation and career advancement have been key focuses for leaders.

Engaged employees lead to satisfied consumers and a better community. With this in mind, Mile Bluff employees were given opportunities over the past year to join an Acts of Kindness challenge, participate in monthly activities coordinated by the Fun Squad, and give back to the community.

While employee culture is the foundation of an organization, wages must be competitive to retain good staff members. To help with these efforts, Mile Bluff invested in a new compensation system that has the flexibility to adjust to changes in the market quickly. The new program has already led to an increase in pay for hundreds of employees, and is being used to help attract new staff members to the team.



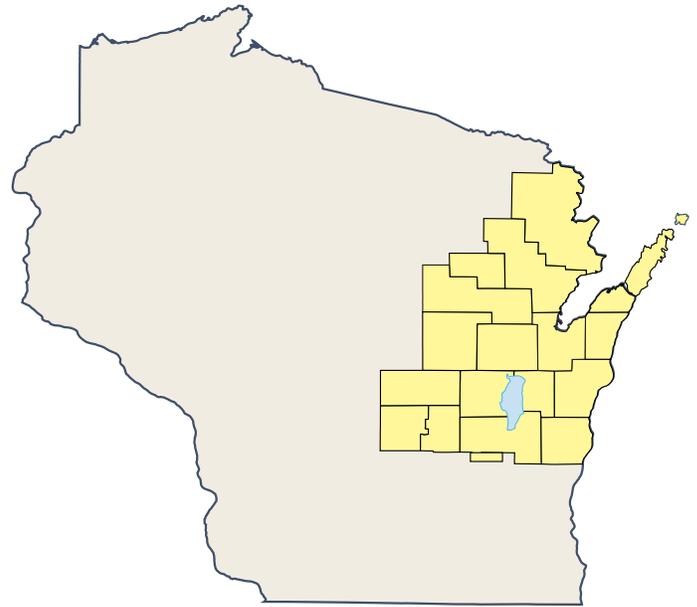
*Mile Bluff's Fun Squad plans employee events throughout the year, including festive sweater and scrub day in December.*

Other tools that have been added to assist with recruitment and retention include sign-on and referral bonuses, as well as on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs for CNAs and CMAs. Mile Bluff and its foundation also award scholarships to graduating seniors at local high schools who are pursuing a career in health care. There are also scholarship and tuition reimbursement programs available to Mile Bluff team members.

The combination of these initiatives is allowing Mile Bluff to continue to move forward as a strong organization with a strong team.

**Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston**

## Packerland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$317,604,733**

### Charity Care

#### Child Advocacy Center Offers Care and Services to Kids, Families

Children's Wisconsin's Fox Valley Child Advocacy Center (CAC) located in Neenah brings together a specially trained team of pediatric professionals to investigate cases of child maltreatment. The CAC is a child-focused and friendly setting that provides comprehensive services through specialized medical evaluations, forensic interviews, advocacy case management and mental health treatment. The CAC enables children and their families to heal from abuse and helps advocate for safe and secure living environments. While Children's receives grant support and medical evaluations are billed through insurance, the remaining CAC services provided to families are free of charge.

A teenager came to the Fox Valley CAC for a forensic interview and medical forensic exam following sexual abuse. She and her two family members, whom she lived with, were refugees. The teen was egregiously sexually assaulted by one of the family members and sustained injuries. Unfortunately, her other family member didn't believe or support her. In addition to the medical care she received, the teen also began seeing a therapist at the CAC to work through her trauma. An advocate at the CAC continues to check in with and support the teen, especially as the court process with the perpetrator proceeds. Interviews, advocacy, follow-up, therapy and court accompaniment are all services that the CAC provides free of charge. The teen was able to receive all her services at the CAC and talk to professionals that listened and

supported her. The Fox Valley CAC helps Children's to care for kids through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach.

### Children's Wisconsin Fox Valley, Neenah

## 10,000 Smiles and Counting in Brown County

In Wisconsin, one third of children are on Medicaid. Of this population, only 28% of children receive dental care. Improving access to dental care can lead to better overall health and a reduction of patients seeking emergent dental care services in hospital emergency departments.

Oral Health Partnership (OHP), a nonprofit founded in Green Bay, provides underserved children living in Brown County and surrounding counties access to preventive, restorative and emergency dental services at no cost. It offers a school-based dental care program, five clinic locations throughout Green Bay, and partners with three Green Bay hospitals – including HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center – to provide treatment for complex dental conditions that require an operating room setting. In 2022 alone, a record 10,056 children have been treated.

As an OHP partner, HSHS St. Vincent and St. Mary's Hospitals provide operating room space and the assistance of its surgical staff to OHP physicians at no cost to OHP or the patient. Procedures may include the treatment of multiple cavities in young children, abscessed teeth and/or teeth extraction. Through direct grants, more than \$150,000 has been donated to support these efforts and more than 3,000 patients have been treated in HSHS facilities.

### HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Green Bay

## COVID-19 Efforts

### SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital Supports COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Efforts

SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital – Fond du Lac collaborated with the Fond du Lac County Public Health Department and United Way as part of a Vaccine Equity Team to advance health equity by promoting a better understanding of the COVID-19 vaccine. The team worked to debunk misinformation and reach out to communities historically underserved by access to health care—people of color, the elderly, LBGTQ+ and rural residents.

As part of the effort, the team participated in a vaccine ambassador training program to help them in their conversations with those who were hesitant about receiving the COVID-19 vaccinations or needed more information about the vaccines.

Family medicine physician Taha El-Shahat, MD, from the SSM Health Fond du Lac Regional Clinic, helped answer any medical questions the new ambassadors had during an in-person phase of the training program.

Equipped with the latest knowledge about the COVID-19 vaccines, the ambassadors learned how to engage others in conversation about their hesitancy in a respectful and empathetic way, and how to promote vaccine acceptance.

The ambassadors also helped direct others to credible sources of information about the vaccines and learn how to recognize and respond to misinformation about COVID-19 and the vaccines. The ambassadors used course materials developed by Johns Hopkins University and Medicine International Vaccine Access Center.

### SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac

## ThedaCare Team Members Help During COVID-19 Surge

Throughout the region, COVID-19 cases continue to increase and ThedaCare, as well as other health systems in the state, are seeing a surge in patients, including COVID inpatient and intensive care. The increased number of patients, which includes those infected with COVID-19 and those being treated for other health conditions, is leading to staffing challenges.

“During this time of workplace shortages nationally, ThedaCare, like nearly all health care systems, is not immune to these challenges,” said Chief Human Resources Officer Maggie A. Lund. “Through the ability to quickly adjust plans to provide care and support the needs of patients and communities, ThedaCare has implemented several solutions to help with staffing levels, including some innovative measures that are having a positive impact within our system. We continue to be dedicated to providing the best care possible for our patients.”

ThedaCare has, and continues to be committed to team members, with no layoffs or furloughs. Plans to address staffing levels include:

- Redeploying team members to areas of need;
- Accepting applications for all roles;
- Offering sign-on and referral bonuses for specific roles; and,
- Adding additional temporary staff through other resources and partners, including the Wisconsin Emergency Assistance Volunteer Registry.



In addition to those solutions, ThedaCare has also requested all exempt, or salaried team members, both in clinical and non-clinical roles, to provide eight hours every one to two weeks in a needed role to alleviate some of the work or stress on frontline staff.

Depending upon the license and skill set of team members, each will have the ability to select from four roles, where they meet qualifications. Examples include assisting with housekeeping duties, stocking/running supplies, helping patients order meals and collecting/distributing meal trays. If a person has an active license, for example, a Registered Nurse (RN) or Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), this team member could provide time at a vaccination clinic or perform COVID-19 testing.

“It is important to note that we do not have exempt team members in roles that provide direct patient care unless they are qualified to do so,” said Lund.

When a team member signs up for a shift, a leader contacts them ahead of the shift to discuss skill set and ensure it is an appropriate assignment match. When the person arrives to the designated area, they are met by a qualified team member or leader who provides an overview of assignment. According to Lund, the initial call-to-action will be for a period of six weeks and will be evaluated based on COVID-19 activity in the region, census in facilities and staffing needs.

**ThedaCare, Neenah**

### *Health Equity*

## **SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital Helps Start Waupun Fire's Emergency Medical Responder Program**

SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital assisted in launching the Waupun Fire Department's Emergency Medical Responder program in the City of Waupun with a \$4,000 grant, along with medical oversight, in 2022.

The Waupun Fire Department began offering the new services in February 2022 as part of the overall Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system. Emergency medical responders are dispatched to provide initial patient care until the ambulance arrives or assist paramedics at the scene.

The grant helped to cover equipment costs, including medical bags, airway management equipment, blood pressure cuff, stethoscopes, dressings/bandaging, rescue blankets, hot/cold packs, tourniquets, glucometers, splinting equipment, and pulse oximeters.

“I am fortunate to have the opportunity to serve the community,” says Syed Mohiuddin, MD, SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital's emergency medicine medical director, who provides medical oversight for the new program. “Seconds matter in life threatening conditions and to train and keep the first responders is critical to manage before the ambulance arrives.”

In the last year, the Waupun Ambulance District, which serves communities in Fond du Lac and Dodge counties, has experienced an 18% increase in 9-1-1 ambulance calls. These trends were occurring even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital](#)

## Be Well Fox Valley Coalition, Children’s Wisconsin Working to Improve Healthy Food Access

Children’s Wisconsin is proud to be part of Be Well Fox Valley. Be Well is a coalition of community members, health systems, businesses, non-profits, education, philanthropy and the faith community who come together to advance a culture of health and well-being. Be Well focuses on five goals, including to support: healthy local settings to promote healthy choices and behaviors; inclusive public spaces that foster social connections; a regional food system that provides access to healthy and affordable foods; a transportation network that allows for recreation and multimodal options; and strong community and clinical partnerships that help prevent and manage chronic disease.

The health of children is directly impacted by the health of their caretakers. If all individuals in Wisconsin are provided with healthy food options and learn how to prepare nutritious foods, the whole family benefits. Be Well Fox Valley’s 2022 strategic framework supports efforts to reduce the burden of diabetes, improve access to healthy and affordable foods for vulnerable populations and to create healthy food environments. As the initiative’s work continues, Children’s will provide unique insight into the needs of children, support any child-specific program development and support Be Well Fox Valley’s overall efforts in the community.

[Children’s Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah](#)

## \$3.2M Grant for Transportation in Waupaca County

A transportation grant will bring \$3.2 million over three years to Waupaca County. ThedaCare, along with community partners, helped highlight the need for transportation resources in critical access areas.

The transportation solution planned by the community leadership in Waupaca County takes an innovative, yet proven approach to addressing rural transportation through a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) and mobility management model—the practice of using all available resources, and developing new ones to improve mobility, increase efficiency and reduce cost. As recovery from the COVID pandemic continues, the proposed programming will work to ensure

people facing economic insecurity, returning to employment, or endeavoring to maintain employment have affordable transportation options.

In 2018, ThedaCare’s New London Community Health Action Team (CHAT) hosted a “plunge” focused on the issue of transportation. A plunge is a day-long event where diverse community members visit multiples places in the community to hear about an issue, such as transportation, from those who are most affected. After the plunge, all come together to identify assets and gaps and co-create solutions that those most affected believe will have the greatest potential for positive change.

This grant is the latest effort of the transportation team. Last year, transportation options called Make the Ride Happen were announced that help people figure out the best, low-cost options for a ride.

[ThedaCare, Neenah](#)

## Hospital-Supported Initiatives

### Behavioral Health, a signature focus area for the Advocate Aurora Community Strategy

Behavioral health ranked among the top five health issues in both Marinette and Menominee counties. Our hospital serves as a link to connect community members to Aurora’s comprehensive behavioral health services team, which extends behavioral health care into hospital and primary care settings.

As behavioral health professional shortages remain a long-time national, state, and local issue, efforts to recruit, train and retain providers are necessary to increase the numbers of providers available to community members.

Aurora Medical Center-Bay Area has always operated like a community-based hospital, offering programs and services in response to identified community health needs. To address behavioral health concerns in 2021 hospital team members:

- Completed 500 behavioral health intake assessments and provided appropriate referrals were provided, 476 of which were to ADAPT. ADAPT is a publicly funded and operated outpatient clinic (mental health, substance abuse and crisis counseling services) operated by the Marinette County Human Services Department
- Participated on the New Hope Coalition. This five-county initiative supports approximately 160 organizations. The group plans to address substance abuse by focusing on four areas: prevention,

recovery, treatment, sustainability and provider recruitment. This coalition is supported by a three-year federal grant

- Continued to provide medical staff leadership to raise awareness among our prescribers around new state and federal laws impacting prescription practices

Additionally, publicly accessible information was available online regarding our behavioral health services and that of other Advocate Aurora Health hospitals and providers.

### Aurora Medical Center-Bay Area, Marinette

## Home Visiting Services Promote Child and Family Well-Being

To help put parents in the best position possible to help their children thrive, Children's Wisconsin offers a variety of programs for parents and caregivers. This includes providing in-home and group-based parenting education, support and resources to hundreds of families across the state each year. Even with government and philanthropic support, these programs are often a community benefit.

Using evidence-based approaches, home visitors and parent educators help families to improve physical and mental health, engage parents in their child's development, education and achievements, empower families to become economically self-sufficient, and promote positive parenting practices. Parents receive the support, mentoring, guidance, education, resources and opportunities for social connections with others so they can provide children with a healthy, safe and supportive environment.

A mom from the Wausau area was homeless and addicted to heroin after years of childhood sexual and emotional abuse when she found out she was pregnant with her second child. With her sister's help, she sought medical-assisted opioid treatment and supportive services from a nonprofit that helps pregnant women. She signed up for Children's Wisconsin's



Mom, Nicole with her daughter, Kawaii

Start Right parenting support program and soon after her healthy daughter was born, her home visitor helped mom

along her journey. The Children's home visitor helped with holiday gifts, seasonal clothing, parent and child activities and goal setting. This mom is proud to have reconnected with her first child, have her own apartment, a steady job and is enrolled in college – thanks to her hard work and Children's Wisconsin support.

### Children's Wisconsin-Fox Valley, Neenah

## Aurora BayCare is a Long-Time Site for WARM Training

Addressing shortages in health care providers, specifically in rural areas is a focus area for Aurora BayCare Medical Center. The University of Medicine and Public Health Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine (WARM) program is a competitive program, admitting applicants who demonstrate a strong commitment to practice medicine in rural Wisconsin. Admission is limited to 26 residents from Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota or Michigan. Aurora BayCare Medical Center serves as a training site for the WARM program and hosted 12 students in 2021.

In addition to serving as a WARM training site for assigned students, Aurora BayCare hosted an Advanced Wilderness Life Support (AWLS) training in Fall 2021, which they will host again in fall 2022. This course welcomes 25 WARM students from across Wisconsin. The course is largely taught by the hospital's emergency medical physicians and focuses on low resource medicine.

Additionally, the hospital's WARM students have been directly engaged with the community in a number of ways this past year, including participation in:

- Compress & Shock classes teaching basic CPR skills to community members
- Stop the Bleed presentations to a local high school shop class
- Sturgeon Bay YMCA Diabetes Prevention Program presentation
- Docs Ought to Care (DOC) presentations to science classes at local high schools involving real animal organs
- Narcan Training to local high school students
- Staffing rest stations at BayCare Century race. One of our WARM students took first place in the race itself!

Participation in the WARM program is just one way Aurora BayCare is helping to train providers prepared to help care for rural patients.

### Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay

## Making Healthy Foods More Accessible

Food insecurity is defined as the disruption of food intake or eating patterns due to lack of resources. No matter the barrier influencing a family's food security, access to healthy foods is crucial to maintaining wellness. According to Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, 4% of survey respondents reported their household went hungry because they were unable to afford enough food in the past year.

The City of Manitowoc Downtown Farmers Market provides access to many locally grown or sourced produce and products. The Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County provided funding that made it possible for market guests to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables utilizing EBT services. This increased access to fresh foods for those in our community who are food insecure and have FoodShare benefits. In addition to this strategic financial support, hospital team members support the farmers market by staffing an educational booth.

Some other examples of the hospital's efforts to expand access to healthy food within the community include:

- Educating families about the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The program provides supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. In 2021, our hospital educated 210 families about the program.
- Our hospital also continues to provide in-kind food donations to local food pantries. The food pantries then distribute the food directly to families in need, with a total value of \$26,964 donated in 2021.

### Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County, Two Rivers

## Safe Mom Safe Baby

Safe Mom Safe Baby (SMSB) is an Abuse Response program that addresses the needs of pregnant women experiencing domestic violence. Our nurse case manager provides guidance that makes a positive impact on pregnant women and their newborns. Every survivor's healing journey is unique, which is why we consider each woman's unique needs and circumstances. We then tailor prenatal and perinatal care and advocacy services to enhance the health and safety of pregnant survivors and improve birth outcomes.

One-on-one support from our nurse case manager may include:

- Eliminating barriers to care
- Helping survivors build a support network
- Increasing personal safety
- Coordination with community resources
- Home visits
- Assistance accessing prenatal care
- Counseling
- Referrals to other services

The SMSB program was introduced at Aurora Medical Center – Sheboygan County in 2018 and supported three women that year. In 2021, the program served 18 women, providing seven women with intensive support to increase their safety and the safety of their babies. All seven women who received intensive support displayed improved safety behaviors because of their participation in the program. Five women involved in the program delivered their babies in 2021. Through this support all five participants who gave birth in 2021 were able to reach full-term and their babies were within normal birth weight ranges.

### Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center

## The Challenges of Helping Those with Behavioral Health Issues

"Access to behavioral services in our community is a significant issue," Door County Medical Center's (DCMC) Behavioral Health Coordinator Barb Johnson-Giese, said. "In Door County, the ratio of population to mental health providers is 715:1. The ratio in the state of Wisconsin is currently 440:1, which ranks 34th in the nation."



An unfortunate reality for medical professionals in the Door County community and beyond is that physicians are increasingly pressured to diagnose and treat mental and behavioral health problems that they are often not adequately trained to diagnose or treat. The reason for this discrepancy is that as many as 70% of primary care visits are driven by patients' psychological problems, such as anxiety,

panic, depression, and stress. Furthermore, more than 80% of patients with medically unexplained symptoms receive psychosocial treatment in primary care by a physician—and yet, only about 10% will follow up on a referral to a mental health provider that is not conveniently located.

“The lack of mental health providers was identified as the #1 need in Door County, as 20% of the population in the U.S. experiences some type of mental health problems during a one-year period,” Johnson-Giese added. “In addition, mental health problems lead to increases in other chronic health conditions, and it’s paramount to treat the whole person.”

With this information in mind, DCMC has taken the initiative to provide services to address the needs of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit alike. DCMC offers three service lines, depending on the individual needs of any given patient.

DCMC’s first behavioral health service line includes psychotherapy services, focused on addressing all mental health concerns including but not limited to: depression, mood issues, stress management, anxiety, family & personal relationships, parenting concerns, work-related stress or conflicts, grief & loss, abuse or other types of trauma, and emotional issues related to health & medical concerns.

The second service line includes behavioral health psychiatric services such as mental health needs that may benefit from medication, addressing all mental health concerns and diagnoses.

The third service line includes Senior Life Solutions, which aims to address some of the problematic changes that aging brings about, including anxiety, changes in appetite, depression, difficulty sleeping, and more.

### **An Increase in Volume Demands a Capacity Increase**

As a result of the huge increase in patient volume that has been observed in recent years, DCMC is working hard to increase its patient capacity. For context, about 20% of American adults are currently experiencing a mental illness, equivalent to nearly 50 million people. In Wisconsin, 20.19% of adults—just over 900,000—are currently experiencing some form of mental illness. These numbers reflect a growing trend since March of 2020. For providers, this is like fighting an uphill battle.

[Door County Medical Center, Sturgeon Bay](#)

## **Medication Take Back Event in Manitowoc County Successful**

Every three years, Froedtert Holy Family Memorial Hospital (FHFMH) partners with other local health care organizations and community leaders to assess the health needs of

Manitowoc County. Prescription or over-the-counter drug abuse is one of the key health issues identified in Manitowoc County.

To prevent unused medications from falling into the wrong hands or entering the environment and water supply, FHFMH hosted the community’s first Medication Take Back event in April as part of National Prescription Drug Take Back Day. This effort was a collaboration between Manitowoc County Recycling Center & Compost Sites, Manitowoc Police Department and Manitowoc County Metro Drug Unit.



The event was open to the public for the safe disposal of most medications. This included prescription and over-the-counter medications, ointments, patches, non-aerosol sprays, inhalers, creams, liquids, and pet medications. Approximately 352 pounds of medications were collected during the event.

[Froedtert Holy Family Memorial Hospital, Manitowoc](#)

## **Oconto County Mental Health CHIP Team Makes Strides for Community**

When it came to tackling the all-important issue of mental health in Oconto County, Bellin Health Oconto Hospital and HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital knew they would be stronger together—and that teaming with the community would be key to making real progress for the patients and communities they serve.

The county’s 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment identified mental health as a top priority, and the COVID-19 pandemic only served to underscore the need. Since then, the multi-partner Oconto County Mental Health Work Group has been laser-focused on a multifaceted plan to address mental health needs for youth and adults alike.

“There is no question that we can accomplish more working together than we ever could on our own,” said Bellin Health Oconto Hospital Vice President and co-chair of the Healthy

Oconto County Steering Team Julie Bieber. “The level of collaboration has been outstanding, and we continue to work with and learn from the incredible health system and community partners that bring so much to the table.”

Director of Community Benefits & Advocacy at HSHS Wisconsin and fellow Healthy Oconto County Steering Team Co-Chair David Lally added, “Many of these partners have been doing great work in this space for some time, and it’s inspiring to see the care and commitment they have to this community. By working together, we are able to take it to the next level, now and into the future.”

In addition to the health systems, the Healthy Oconto County Mental Health Work Group includes representation from schools, local government, public health, diocesan leaders, community agencies, law enforcement, veterans’ services and more. It aims to promote optimal mental health for Oconto County residents by increasing awareness of and access to mental health services and resources.

“We look forward to continuing to make a difference for this community,” Bieber said, “and we are 100 percent in this together.”

### [Bellin Health Oconto Hospital and HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital, Oconto and Oconto Falls](#)

## **Nurse’s Nook Pilots Summer Meal Program**

Summer 2022 was a busy and exciting season at the Nurse’s Nook within HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital. Nurse’s Nook provides aid such as non-perishable food, clothes and hygiene needs to Oconto County families free-of-charge, as needs are identified.



*Fresh produce for families through Nurse's Nook*

The Nurse’s Nook weekend food program runs only through the school year so a summer meal program was implemented to provide nutritious meals for families to bridge the gap. Through a partnership with Sarah Schindel, FoodWise nutrition educator from Oconto County UW-Extension, healthy and kid-friendly menus were created, which included fresh vegetables, eggs and berries from local farmers and the

Oconto County Farmers Market. The program also worked with Pat’s Market in Gillett to supply families with fresh meat and groceries. In exchange for participating, parents were asked to invite their children to prepare the meals together.

Many parents sent messages sharing the fun they were having with their kids. Naturally, there were many “no, thank you” bites to begin but over time, these turned into foods the whole family enjoyed.

Prevea Health offered use of their parking lot for meal pick-ups, providing a central location for families to meet. Families also learned about the Oconto County Farmers Market and were excited to learn that vendors accepted SNAP cards to purchase local and fresh produce.

One family shared, “Our bag of fresh green beans never made it home! Our kids ate the bag while shopping and as a snack on the way home.”

### [HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital, Oconto Falls](#)

## **“Mental Health Moments” Series Supports Bellin Employees, Community**

Pandemic-related lockdowns may be a thing of the past, but the spotlight shone on mental health during those early months remains an important health system and community focus for Bellin Health and Bellin Psychiatric Center (BPC).

Bellin launched “Mental Health Moments” in May 2020 to help people identify and cope with mental health issues. The online webinar series showcases educational and inspirational mental health-focused conversations between BPC Behavioral Health Therapist Charles LaTorre, Bellin Health & Wellbeing Strategist Linda Golik and special guests. The initial goal was to provide mental wellbeing assistance during the pandemic, but the program’s purpose has evolved to focus on spreading the word about the importance of mental health awareness and reducing the stigma often associated with the topic.

“These conversations are critical to let people know they’re not alone in facing mental health challenges or struggling to talk to loved ones who may need help,” Golik said. “Our topics have included everything from grief to building healthy relationships and talking to teens about social media. Our goal is to offer frank conversation, expert takes and real-life advice for those looking to improve their relationship with their own mental health—or to support those they love in their mental health journey.”

Mental Health Moments began as an outreach effort for Bellin’s employer and community partners, but through some additional publicity and great word of mouth, the series’ popularity has spread to many in the community and even elsewhere in the world. Mental Health Moments is now a

podcast, as well, offering easily accessible mental health content for individuals on the go.

“We know these are important conversations to have, and we want to be as accessible as possible for those who may be struggling—or even those who just want to talk more about this often-overlooked but critical aspect of our health,” LaTorre said. “We look forward to continuing this series for the benefit of patients and community alike.”

### Bellin Psychiatric Center, Green Bay

## SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital Opens State’s First Mental Health Outpatient Day Stabilization Unit

SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital became the first in Wisconsin to offer a mental health outpatient day stabilization unit in September 2022. Thanks to a \$158,000 Wisconsin Healthcare Infrastructure Capital Grant, this innovative new unit provides a dedicated place for patients in crisis to receive immediate behavioral health services and support for up to 23 hours.



*SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital celebrated the upcoming opening of its new Day Stabilization Services with SSM Health leaders, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers, and other state of Wisconsin legislators.*

The new day stabilization unit accommodates eight patients in crisis who can voluntarily receive therapy, be assessed for further treatment needs and get assistance with family and discharge planning. The goal is to help individuals resolve their crisis and make appropriate community connections for ongoing services.

Caregivers in the unit work with Fond du Lac County mental health crisis team members and the hospital’s emergency department on substance abuse and mental health screening of patients to determine the appropriate level of care. The Foundation for Ripon Medical Center has contributed \$75,000 to assist patients with transportation needs.

The new unit reflects SSM Health’s commitment to talk more openly about mental health and bridge gaps in mental health services, particularly in rural communities. The unit is intended to help offset the high demand for psychiatric and outpatient mental health services where patients in crisis often must wait six to eight months or more for a behavioral health services appointment.

### SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital, Ripon

## Seeking Help with Addiction

In 2020, 52% of respondents of the Sheboygan County Community Health Survey cited illegal drug use as the top health issue facing Sheboygan County. In 2021, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital Emergency Department in Sheboygan expanded its emergency services to include an opioid recovery program. The project is funded by a \$134,499 grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) administered by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Care and Treatment Services.

In order to enhance local emergency services and better meet the needs of Sheboygan and its surrounding communities, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital Emergency Department has developed additional processes and protocols so patients can be assessed anytime, day or night. This is for those who may be overdosing, withdrawing or just ready to start recovery from heroin or pain pills. Those seeking help may be started on a lifesaving medication to aid them on their path to recovery and are connected with recovery coaches from Wisconsin Recovery Community Organization. The medical team at HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital Emergency Department then coordinates treatment for the patient with the appropriate treatment center.

Patients seeking help with their addiction are offered long-term recovery options. A buprenorphine treatment is administered, which is a lifesaving medication and acts as a long-term treatment option. From there, patients are connected to a recovery coach from the Wisconsin Recovery Community Organization where they can seek support and have guidance on their path to recovery.

National experts in addiction medicine, as well as local experts in emergency care, addiction medicine, psychiatry, mental health, primary care, and those working in the recovery community, collaborated to develop this improved offering at HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital.

Since the program’s inception, 24 patients have begun buprenorphine treatments to begin their journey to getting their life back.

### HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, Sheboygan

## ThedaCare Substance Use Disorder Program Helps Patients Move Toward Recovery

### Nearly 200 Individuals Introduced to ED2R+ in 18 Months

Every three years, ThedaCare completes a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) for each of the seven hospitals. In the most recent assessment, all seven plans clearly identified substance use as one of the top three health concerns in the ThedaCare service area, and this is largely driven by prescription opioids.

In fact, 2021 was the deadliest year on record for drug overdoses in U.S. history.

“Substance use disorders continue to increase throughout the country and in our region,” said Director of Community Health Improvement at ThedaCare Paula Morgen. “We knew substance abuse was a significant problem pre-COVID, and the pandemic added to the issue. According to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 107,000 Americans died from opioid or stimulant-related overdoses between December 2020 and December 2021. That was a 15% increase over the previous year.”

To help address the health concerns driven by prescription opioids, ThedaCare and partners launched the Emergency Department to Recovery Plus (ED2R+) program in December 2020.

“The Emergency Department to Recovery Plus (ED2R+) offers patients who come to an emergency department (ED) with an opioid or stimulant overdose the opportunity to engage with recovery coaches to address their substance abuse disorder,” explained ThedaCare Community Health Coordinator Tracey Ratzburg. “ThedaCare partners with Apricity—a recovery nonprofit organization providing treatment, employment, transitional living and educational opportunities—to supply the recovery coaches who assist patients in recovery.”

ThedaCare and Apricity operate jointly under a grant that uses state opioid dollars funded through Wisconsin Voices for Recovery and supported by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The grant covers the cost of peer support from a recovery coach for up to 18 months.

ThedaCare introduced the ED2R+ program in December 2020 at ThedaCare Medical Centers in Berlin, Neenah and Shawano. ThedaCare initially planned to introduce ED2R+ to their remaining four hospitals over two to three years. That plan was quickly expanded in the summer of 2021 to include all seven ThedaCare Medical Centers, Behavioral Health and

the inpatient behavioral health unit at ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah.

“It’s important to recognize that we implemented this program in December 2020, which was during the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic,” Morgen said. “While our health care teams were focused on responding to the pandemic, they also knew this program was vital to support those who were struggling most as a fallout of the pandemic.”

ThedaCare, Neenah

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### Bellin Health Launches Campaign to Grow, Develop Healthcare Workforce

As workforce shortages plagued Wisconsin, Bellin Hospital implemented a careers and recruiting campaign to ensure its ability to offer the highest quality of care to the patients and communities it serves. This campaign, developed through months of research, feedback from focus groups and creative development with providers and staff from across Bellin Health System, is designed to attract, develop and retain talented health care professionals.



*Bellin Health's 2022 careers and recruiting campaign places an emphasis on what makes Bellin Health the best place to give and receive care—the health system's 5,000 employees. This is a social media image from the dynamic new campaign.*

Bellin Health prides itself on being the health care employer of choice in northeast Wisconsin, and this all starts with placing an emphasis on the development and wellbeing of employees. Leadership at Bellin feels strongly that employees are more than individuals who make up staffs and teams—they're human. And echoed throughout this campaign is the understanding that Bellin not only values the work an employee does, but it also values the importance of their ability to live a happy, healthy life.

“This campaign places an emphasis on what makes Bellin Health the best place to give and receive care, and that’s

our employees,” said Bellin Health Team Leader, Human Resources Debbie Thompson. “They’re at the core of the work we do for our patients and communities, and being a great place to works centers around taking care of them.”

Photography and video of more than 50 Bellin employees are featured in the assets of this all-encompassing campaign, which helps capture and convey the true essence of working at Bellin. These advertisements are featured in digital placements via online and mobile, connected TV, streaming audio and radio services, billboards, career sites, social media and a reimagined bellin.org/careers web page.

Bellin also provides a number of other pathways to a career in health care, starting with initiatives involving local high schools. Its Youth Apprenticeship Program and Career Academy are centered around early opportunity and growth while incentivizing program completion with employment guarantees and degree opportunities at Bellin College.

**Bellin Hospital, Green Bay**

## **SSM Health Greater Fond du Lac Hospitals Support CNA Scholarships**

SSM Health is supporting individuals interested in becoming certified nursing assistants (CNAs) through a \$6,000 scholarship grant to the Moraine Park Foundation. The grant was given on behalf of SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital and SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital. The donation will allow the Foundation to provide scholarships for students seeking to become CNAs.



*SSM Health in the Greater Fond du Lac area presents CNA scholarship grant to Moraine Park Foundation.*

“CNAs represent an essential part of the patient-care team,” according to Nicole Gill, vice president of patient care services & chief nursing officer, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital

and SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital. “In assisting the medical staff, CNAs not only provide physical care for patients but also emotional and spiritual support, truly making a difference in the lives of patients and families. SSM Health values the CNA profession and is honored to help support the career in our communities.”

The scholarship is one way that the SSM Health Greater Fond du Lac Region can meet a growing demand for CNAs.

“These clinicians play a vital role on our care delivery team working closely with patients to ensure their physical and emotional needs are met,” Tami Schattschneider, vice president of patient care services & chief nursing officer, SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital. “St. Agnes deeply appreciates the value that CNAs bring to the care we provide and is pleased to partner with The Moraine Park Foundation to provide financial support through scholarships for those who have chosen this noble career path.”

**SSM Health St. Agnes Hospital - Fond du Lac, SSM Health Ripon Community Hospital, SSM Health Waupun Memorial Hospital**

# Southeastern Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$914,095,706**

## Charity Care

### Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance

When patients are faced with large medical bills, especially those resulting from an emergency, it may feel impossible to handle. In some cases, patients may not even be aware that financial assistance exists. At Advocate Aurora, their mission is to help people live well—from physical and emotional health to financial health as well.

Financial health means understanding the cost of health care services, and having access to the plans, programs, and financial assistance options that are right for the patient. Advocate Aurora Health's financial assistance program provides discounts to patients (up to 100 percent of hospital charges) for those who meet financial eligibility guidelines.

Advocate Aurora prides itself on assisting individuals in need, and all patients are encouraged to seek information from their hospital's financial advocate if they anticipate difficulty paying their portion of the hospital bill. The advocates make every effort to seek out patients who are uninsured, underinsured or may face other financial challenges associated with paying for the health care services. Not only do the advocates walk patients through the entire application process, but they also assist patients with applying for available government programs and worker's compensation or liability claims.

One example of the great work their financial advocates do comes from one patient's story: A financial advocate supporting Aurora Sinai Medical Center received a call from a nurse regarding a Spanish-speaking patient with a serious chronic kidney disease who was experiencing severe symptoms that required emergency interventions. However, the patient was hesitant to consent to care as he was uninsured and unable to afford the cost of care.

The financial advocate worked with an interpreter to complete a financial assessment; at which time the financial advocate also learned the patient was undocumented. The financial advocate assured the patient his identity is safe and that being undocumented did not make him ineligible to apply for financial assistance. Following the assessment completion, the financial advocate was able to approve the patient for a 100% discount on the care he needed through the Advocate Aurora Patient Financial Assistance Program.

**Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee**

### Dispensary of Hope Provides Medications to Eligible Patients at No Charge

As medication costs continue to rise, pharmacists and technicians are challenged to not only make sure medications are safe and effective, but affordable for patients. For patients without prescription insurance, financial barriers can make it challenging to adhere to drug therapy regimens. Ascension Wisconsin's retail pharmacies' partnership with Dispensary of Hope has created a patient assistance program to provide eligible patients medications at no charge. Dispensary of Hope is a charitable medication distributor that provides participating pharmacies and clinics with access to medications donated by pharmaceutical manufacturers. Ascension pays the fees and labor costs to participate in the program. The Dispensary of Hope program is key to reducing avoidable hospital readmissions and emergency room use that often results from lack of access to affordable medication.

The past few years, the pharmacy team greatly impacted people in need at Ascension Medical Missions at Home in Racine and Milwaukee, filling hundreds of prescriptions for people in need, which was largely made possible through its partnership with the Dispensary of Hope, as well as other programs designed to help reduce medication access related issues. To date, Ascension Wisconsin providers have connected 1,456 low-income patients in need of critical medication with 6,791 free prescriptions through the Dispensary of Hope.

**Ascension Wisconsin, Milwaukee**

## Children’s Wisconsin School Health Nurses Provide Care and Support to Students

Children’s Wisconsin provides 11 Milwaukee Public Schools with full-time school nurses reflecting their commitment to support and advance total well-being for all kids. They aim to improve both health and academic outcomes by assessing the students’ needs first and using a collaborative approach to meet those needs.

During the 2021-22 school year, the Children’s nurses found innovative ways to support the increased needs of the nearly 4,000 students they care for with social emotional support, mask wearing, social distancing and resuming childhood immunization schedules. Approximately one-third of the students Children’s school nurses care for have a chronic health condition and nearly half are living below the poverty level. Children’s school nurse program continues to expand upon the role to include enhanced case management and care coordination, advocacy, attendance monitoring and social-emotional well-being making the role of the school nurse an essential partner within the school to support the students, families and the community.

Prior to the pandemic, the Children’s nurse at Clarke Street Elementary was working with a student who had more than a dozen school nurse office visits for asthma symptoms and struggled with unstable housing. Utilizing a student-centered, collaborative care coordination approach, the student was referred to Children’s Community Health Asthma Management Program (CHAMP) and got connected to Children’s Specialty Care for treatment. With those connections and support, the student is doing well and has only had one school nurse visit for asthma symptoms this school year.

### Children’s Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## Community Outreach Health Clinic Helps Patient with Alcohol Addiction

A 64-year-old patient struggling with alcohol addiction was referred to the Community Outreach Health Clinic (COHC) at Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital after an admission to the hospital for pancreatitis due to his drinking. Every two to three weeks, the patient comes to the COHC for diabetes management and counseling for his addiction and depression. When he started receiving treatment at the COHC, he was experiencing depression and grief due to the loss of his wife, which caused his drinking to escalate. Our counselor used psychological tools and education to help him with his addiction and depression, and he has decreased his alcohol consumption by using those tools and education. His diabetes is also under control with the diabetic management and

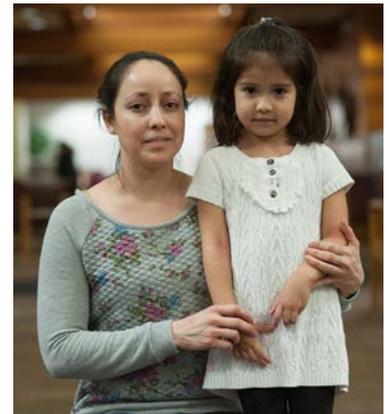
education he has received, as well as the positive changes he has made in his life. The patient had tried addiction counseling in the past, but it did not work for him. He is grateful for the help from the COHC. “The staff at the COHC have been so helpful,” he said. “I’m glad the hospital has a clinic for patients like me.”

The Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics awarded the COHC the Gold Seal of Excellence in 2021. The association recognized the COHC for promoting best practices and maximizing access to quality health care for the most vulnerable populations. The COHC has provided care for uninsured and underinsured adults in the area for more than 20 years. It is just the seventh free clinic out of 94 in the state to earn the WAFCC Gold Seal.

### Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital, Menomonee Falls

## Access to Specialty Care for the Uninsured—A Coordinated Approach

With 5-10% of Milwaukee County residents uninsured at any point in time, Milwaukee’s health systems have sponsored free clinics and worked closely with Federally Qualified Health Clinics (FQHCs) and other community clinics to weave a stronger safety net of care for low-income and vulnerable individuals. While these safety net clinics can provide primary care to uninsured patients, access to specialty care remained a challenge.



Through the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership, the four Milwaukee health systems—Advocate Aurora Health, Ascension Wisconsin, Children’s Wisconsin and Froedtert Health—established the Specialty Access for Uninsured Program (SAUP) to create a barrier-free, coordinated process to provide much needed specialty testing and treatment for uninsured patients.

SAUP improves efficiency and effectiveness of care between health partners, and offers timely, managed, and clinically appropriate access to specialty care for more than 21,000 uninsured patients who are established in a primary care medical home at one of Milwaukee’s eleven participating safety-net clinics. The result? In 2021 alone, the three adult health systems have guided more than 1,500 referrals for specialty services – from cancer treatment to vascular surgery!

20-year-old Haydee visited her community health center to remove a simple cyst on her forehead. When the results were positive for Lymphoma, Haydee didn't know what to do. She was uninsured and scared. Through SAUP, Haydee was able to see an oncologist and get treatment. She was so grateful, a few years later after graduating college Haydee returned to work at the hospital where she received care.

### Milwaukee Health Care Partnership

## A Collaborative Effort Addresses the Needs of a Dental Patient

A patient came to Albrecht Free Clinic in West Bend complaining of mouth pain. During an emergency exam with the clinic's dental provider, a cyst was discovered near a tooth that needed to be extracted. With the help of a payment voucher, the patient was sent to an oral surgeon who determined the patient needed a CT scan, and then possibly a biopsy and surgery. The patient was prescribed antibiotics for his dental infection. The CT scan was donated by Froedtert West Bend Hospital and reviewed by Gary Herdrich, MD, Albrecht Free Clinic medical director. The CT scan ultimately showed the patient needed surgery by an oral surgeon.

The patient did not have insurance and could not afford the cost of the surgery, so a call was made to the Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics to try to find an oral surgeon who would be willing to take on this patient. A surgeon at Winnebago Oral Surgery graciously agreed to perform the surgery at no charge. Without the collaborative effort of Albrecht Free Clinic and Froedtert West Bend Hospital staff and a philanthropic oral surgeon, the patient would still be suffering with a painful, infected tooth.

### Froedtert West Bend Hospital, West Bend

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Children's Wisconsin, Community Partners Expand Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Milwaukee Students and Families

Shortly after school-age children became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, Children's Wisconsin and Chorus Community Health Plan (CCHP) partnered with the City of Milwaukee Health Department to host five free COVID-19 and flu vaccine clinics in November and December 2021. The Milwaukee Health Department supplied the vaccines and PPE while Children's and CCHP provided nurses and registration staff to administer the vaccines at various north and south side Milwaukee Public Schools. The clinics offered flu vaccines and both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, providing more than 350 pediatric vaccines and more than 180 adult vaccines.

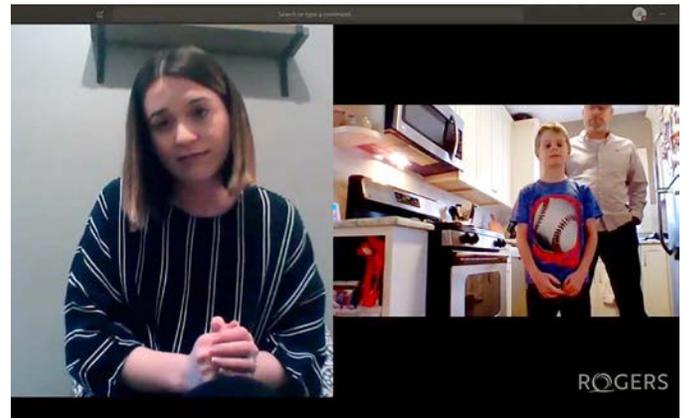
"We have this process down to a science," said Smriti Khare, MD, pediatrician at Children's Wisconsin. "We appreciated the partnership to offer this long-awaited opportunity to protect kids from COVID-19 and to help give kids and families a chance to get back on track with preventive care that was more challenging for families to seek during the pandemic."

In addition to these school-based vaccine clinics, Children's and CCHP partnered with Health Connections, Inc. to provide COVID-19 vaccines in a variety of settings, including the Sherman Phoenix, Mexican Fiesta, Pridefest and more. Throughout the partnership with Health Connections Inc., CCHP hosted more than 90 COVID-19 vaccine clinic events throughout the Milwaukee area, vaccinating over 4,000 individuals and providing gift card incentives. Vaccinating kids is a significant step to further mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, and Children's will continue working to improve access and availability of vaccines to families living in Milwaukee.

### Children's Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## Rogers Continues to Use Telehealth to Deliver Mental Health, Addiction Treatment

In response to the pandemic, Rogers Behavioral Health launched a virtual care treatment option in March 2020 called Rogers Connect Care. Since then, Rogers has provided specialized mental health and addiction treatment to more than 6,500 patients who otherwise may not have been able to access care.



*Rogers Connect Care delivers the same evidence-based, clinically proven modalities as in-person treatment.*

In addition to providing an additional option for anyone in outpatient treatment, virtual care has been particularly beneficial for patients who need to be in isolation due to COVID-19. In fact, individuals in inpatient, residential, and outpatient care continue to have access to life-saving treatment as a result of the offerings.



Rogers also recently launched a Telehealth Presence Pilot to access the impact of optimal equipment on perceived quality of delivering and receiving telehealth services.

The need for this work is reinforced in a recent report by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing: *Innovations in Telehealth in Mental Health and Substance Use During COVID-19*.

The report calls for provider investment in the equipment required to enhance “tele-presence” and the overall quality of virtual services: lighting, a good microphone and noise cancelling headphones, and multiple large monitors to simultaneously view assessments, screening results, or handouts in addition to a virtual patient.

As part of the initiative, a cross-functional group of patient care team members are surveying more than 35 telehealth patients on their perceptions of current equipment and a new equipment kit.

By incorporating care team members and patients, Rogers aims to achieve a clear understanding of needs, preferences, and lived experiences.

**Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc**

## *Health Equity*

### **Hypertension Initiative**

Hypertension is a silent killer that disproportionately hurts patients in communities of color. But it’s also a condition we know how to get under control.

That’s why Advocate Aurora Health has pulled together teams from across the system and partnered with community groups to try to close the uncontrolled hypertension gap help Black and Hispanic patients live well. So far, that gap has closed by 13% this year, a result they hope to double next year. Nearly 70% of patients enrolled in their remote BP monitoring have their blood pressure under control within six months.

AAH’s hypertension initiative is one component of the health care system’s larger strategy to address social determinants of health and establish health equity across communities.

Tackling the uncontrolled hypertension problem required bringing together teams from across the health system and both states, including the medical group, nursing, pharmacy, population health and care management, DE&I, Research Institute, mission and spiritual care, community health, information technology, among many others. Together, they formed a Health Equity Council and eight driver teams, which put together a group of clear, measurable goals to work toward vigorously addressing this problem.

Solutions for preventing and managing hypertension include remote and virtual patient monitoring by using blood pressure cuffs, health screenings at clinics, exercise and nutrition education, medication management, provider engagement and community partnerships. Health data has helped inform the geographic areas and people groups with the highest uncontrolled hypertension so Advocate Aurora can proactively reach out with mobile health resources to help them manage it and lessen risk for worsened health issues. They've worked with key partners, including the American Heart Association and Molina Health, which is piloting a Medicaid contract supporting care management and device funding.

In addition, the Advocate Aurora Research Institute is conducting the REDUCE-BP study to evaluate innovative electronic tools Advocate Aurora has designed to help primary care providers and their patients overcome health barriers common to people of color with hypertension. A major focus of this study are e-tools that support screening for social determinants of health, such as food insecurity, with referrals to available community resources for people at medium and high risk.

[Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee](#)

## PTSD Recovery Program Treats Wide Variety of Trauma

In November 2020, Deidre Marsh, MSW, LCSW, licensed behavioral health counselor, began providing PTSD services at Huiras Center, an outpatient behavioral and mental health facility at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital Ozaukee. This was at the time of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since that time, the Huiras Center has provided PTSD services to more than 80 patients. Of those who have completed the program, 75% no longer meet the criteria for PTSD. Using cognitive processing therapy (CPT), a 12-session individual psychotherapy for PTSD treatment, clients can recover in approximately three months. "For our patients, this means being able to return to work, no longer having nightmares or flashbacks, no longer blaming themselves for what happened, having improved self-esteem and self-confidence and building closer, more trusting relationships," said Deidre.

"The community has been increasingly aware and utilizing us as a resource for those they encounter who need PTSD treatment," added Deidre. "A number of our patients have been on Medicaid and unable to find other PTSD treatment providers who accept Medicaid in our area." Patients have been referred by county mental health services, community therapists, residential addiction treatment facilities, inpatient behavioral health units and Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin physicians.

Deidre said the PTSD team has treated a wide variety of trauma, including military combat exposure, rape, childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, loved one's suicide or overdose, physical assaults and vehicle accidents.

[Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital Ozaukee, Mequon](#)

## Brain Injury Day Treatment Center

The Ascension Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Hospital's Brain Injury Day Treatment (BIDT) program in Milwaukee is a subsidized service that supports people's recovery from traumatic brain injury and stroke. It serves as a transition between acute or rehab hospital stay and return to work, school, volunteering and/or home management.

Patients typically participate in the program two to three days a week from 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. and taper down as their skills improve and discharge from the program approaches. This community reintegration program offers a host of services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, vocational counseling, community outings, recreational therapy, case management, nursing, psychology, driver's evaluations, neuropsychology testing as well as a variety of educational and skill-building groups led by therapy staff.



*Ascension Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Hospital brain injury patients and staff enjoy a day at the Milwaukee County Zoo.*

"Traumatic brain injury and post-stroke patients are referred by their provider, hospitalists and via outreach," said Jenna Piala, PT, DPT, rehabilitation services supervisor, Ascension Sacred Heart. "We've assisted everyone from teenagers to robust 80-year-olds. We work on getting people back to living their lives, helping them with everything from cooking in the kitchen, to walking up and down steps, to creating art and returning to work."

After a patient completes evaluations, the multidisciplinary team develops an individualized treatment plan to meet the patient's unique needs. Family training and team conferences are a part of the program to ensure maximal progress and carryover at home. Conditions that could benefit from the BIDT program include but are not limited to CVA (stroke), TBI, anoxia (lack of oxygen), brain abscess, encephalitis, meningitis and brain tumors.

"We've had so many success stories of transitioning patients and helping them return to work," added Jennifer. "One patient was a vendor at the Milwaukee Brewers games and is now back at the stadium doing what he loves."

### **Ascension Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Hospital, Milwaukee**

## **Ascension Wisconsin Blanket of Love for Spanish Speaking Moms**

Ascension Wisconsin has added a bilingual Blanket of Love prenatal education group at Ascension St. Francis Hospital for Spanish speaking moms-to-be. Founded in 2004 by Julia Means, RN, a community and parish nurse for Ascension Wisconsin, Blanket of Love is an educational program for expectant mothers and their families to help reduce infant mortality and promote familial wellness.

The program creates a community of support, an educational presentation and time for sharing with staff and other members of the group. Participants receive education on a variety of topics and strategies to improve the health of the mother and the baby. Young parents receive information about their baby's development, nutritional tips and infant care.

Participants get together once a week for discussions about the role and responsibilities of parenthood, have opportunities to ask questions, talk about their shared experiences, and get medical questions answered as well. The program connects participants to other resources that can help lower stress, support wellness and eliminate the two most preventable causes of infant death in Milwaukee, premature births and unsafe sleeping environments.

Ascension Wisconsin Blanket of Love has grown to include 36 churches, three Ascension Wisconsin hospital campuses (Ascension St. Joseph, Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital Milwaukee and Ascension St. Francis Hospital) and Meta House. Each year, more than 5,200 families receive educational, social and health care resources through Ascension Wisconsin's Blanket of Love.

Throughout the pandemic, moms and their families have been meeting virtually with ongoing case management

assistance. The program also supported a birthday celebration for babies who turned one year old, held walk-through baby showers and connected moms to resources like food, diapers and wipes through the Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center.

Each year in Milwaukee too many infants die before their first birthdays. Infant mortality is a complex problem that requires a sustained community wide effort to address.

The program works in collaboration with church congregations, city officials, homeless shelters, neighborhood centers and community partners.

### **Ascension St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee**

## **Nourishing Partners Program at Children's Wisconsin Helps Combat Food Insecurity**

For many children and families, challenges like food insecurity, financial strain, housing instability and unmet transportation needs impact their ability to achieve optimal health. Addressing all aspects of a child's health is critical to helping support the physical, emotional and social well-being of children and families.



*Maddie Winn, PAC, Children's Emergency Department providing food insecurity screening*

More than 20 percent of children in Wisconsin are food insecure. This burden disproportionately affects households that have lower incomes, have lower education levels, are headed by a single parent or Black or Hispanic families. The disparity in food security between Black and white households in Wisconsin is among the largest in the country. Children's Wisconsin's Nourishing Partners Program includes a variety of initiatives across care settings and in partnership with the community to address food insecurity.

Children's Emergency Department began screening families for food insecurity in 2019 and incorporates results into the health record to help ensure all members of Children's care

team can understand the impact on the child's care and support them in meeting their needs. Families who screen positive for food insecurity get connected with immediate access to food in our cafeteria, as well as receive follow-up outreach and navigation to empower them in connecting with additional Children's and community resources.

Children's has partnered with Chorus Community Health Plans and several community organizations, including Friedens Food Pantries, Feeding America, Upstart Kitchen, Milwaukee Kitchen Cabinet, Sherman Phoenix, American Heart Association and more, to distribute healthy meals, assist with food benefits navigation and support families in obtaining fresh produce at local farmers markets.

[Children's Wisconsin, Milwaukee](#)

## Ascension St. Joseph Provides Health Beyond Health Care

Ascension St. Joseph has invested in the community by working with PRISM Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to support the COVID-19 Emergency Meals Program, UpStart Kitchen entrepreneurs, and the development of a youth culinary training program. These community investments provide immediate relief from food insecurity, related to an increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic while strengthening the future economic stability of some of the most underserved communities in Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood, UpStart Kitchen provides local food entrepreneurs access to an affordable, fully equipped commercial kitchen and business resources to grow or start their own food business.

Through this collaboration with UpStart Kitchen, diabetic patients who are enrolled in Ascension Wisconsin's Under 8 Program, have been provided healthy prepared meals. The 12-week, community-based diabetes education program is designed to help lower elevated A1c in high-risk African American patients with diabetes. Education is focused on improving diabetes care with better blood sugar control, lifestyle modifications, medication adherence and a healthy diet. Participants of the program are able to take home fresh meals from UpStart Kitchen after each class.

Participant Shelly Greer's A1c fell from 10 to 6.3. "Being with other people who have diabetes is the best part of the program," she said. "You can feel like you are alone in this thing and it can be so overwhelming."

The Under 8 program focuses on relationship building between health care providers, participants and peers in a trusting environment.

Through these investments and efforts to improve health equity, Ascension St Joseph is building on its commitment to deliver 'health beyond health care' to its patients and the community.

[Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - St. Joseph Campus, Milwaukee](#)

## Rogers Behavioral Health Gender Affirming Care

Deadnaming and misgendering of gender minority patients creates an unsafe environment that leads to the alienation of a community that is known to be more vulnerable to adverse mental health outcomes, including suicide attempts and completions. Deadnaming is referring to a transgender or non-binary person by a name they used prior to transitioning, and misgendering is using pronouns or form of address that does not reflect the person's identity.

Historically, Rogers was not able to analyze clinical outcomes of gender minority patients because relevant data was not captured. In response, Rogers initiated the Gender Affirming Care initiative, following the patient's journey from the first call to admission.

Phase one focused on doing mandatory collection of chosen name, pronouns, and gender identity during registration. The admission team received training and scripting.



*The Pride Progress Flag features black and brown stripes to portray marginalized LGBTQ+ communities of color and baby blue, pink, and white to incorporate the trans flag in its design.*

Changes were then made to the system-wide electronic health record to promote the display of chosen names and pronouns while suppressing the display of legal name/sex assigned at birth in the patient's chart to prevent deadnaming and misgendering.

Partnering with clinical leadership, Rogers also developed "gender affirming care" expectations, which outline that all patients must be addressed by their chosen names and pronouns and established guidelines around rooming. Training opportunities were also available to medical staff.

Rogers will now focus on analyzing data to improve the patient experience and clinical outcomes. Signage, printed materials, policies, and system-wide best practices will also be reviewed.

[Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc](#)

## Community Conversations Discuss Racism as a Public Health Crisis and Highlight Issues Impacting the Community

As part of the BUCKSFit Healthy Community Conversations series, the Froedtert & MCW health network and the Milwaukee Bucks hosted a virtual conversation for community members. During the conversation, two panels discussed the current social justice movement, the impact of racism on their lives, personal and organizational leadership, social determinants of health, financial and mental health and the impact of COVID-19.

Eric Conley, president of Froedtert Hospital and executive vice president of Froedtert Health, held a series of Milwaukee County community conversations with diverse audiences in partnership with other Froedtert Health senior leaders. Executives met with leaders from the African American, Latinx, Hmong and LGBTQ+ communities, as well as leaders from the Wauwatosa community, to learn about health equity and other issues affecting each group. Eight conversations were held with a total of 180 participants.

[Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin health network, Wauwatosa](#)

## New Mental Health Emergency Center Opens – Key Element of Psychiatric Crisis Services Redesign in Milwaukee

The new Mental Health Emergency Center (MHEC) in Milwaukee County opened its doors on Sept. 9, 2022, to adults and children experiencing a mental health emergency. The MHEC is a historic, public-private joint venture 10 years in the making between Milwaukee County and Milwaukee's four health systems—Advocate Aurora Health, Ascension Wisconsin, Children's Wisconsin, and Froedtert Health. Advocate Aurora Health serves as the manager of the MHEC on behalf of the joint venture members. The new emergency center is one component in the broader array of behavioral health services in Milwaukee.

MHEC, situated on Milwaukee's north side, replaces the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Services hospital, located in Wauwatosa for more than 140 years. Seventy percent of patients previously served at the county's hospital ER live near the new emergency center. The MHEC offers 24/7/365 crisis mental health assessment, stabilization, treatment, and transition care management for children, adolescents, and adults. The goal is for patients to receive timely treatment and transfer to the appropriate level of care.

This unprecedented level of collaboration among and between health systems and county government has resulted in a model of care that will inform future psychiatric crisis delivery models across the state. Anticipated outcomes include more timely access to crisis care for high-acuity voluntary and involuntary patients, a reduction in the engagement of law enforcement with individuals experiencing a serious mental illness, enhanced clinical assessment, and care coordination to continuing care and psychiatric consultation services to medical ERs—all aimed at improving patient and community health.

[Milwaukee Health Care Partnership](#)

## Hospital-Supported Initiatives

### Children's Wisconsin Providing Innovative Kids' Mental Health Services

Children's Wisconsin is transforming its infrastructure and adding unique entry points to better serve kids when a mental health need is identified. This includes the first-of-its-kind pediatric effort to provide same-day care—the Craig Yabuki Mental Health Walk-In Clinic. The Walk-In Clinic provides care for kids ages 5-18 with urgent mental health issues with no appointment needed. Clinicians evaluate the child, provide a brief intervention, help coordinate care and ensure families are connected to additional resources or follow-up care.



*Craig Yabuki Mental Health Walk-In Clinic at Children's Wisconsin.*

Following the Waukesha holiday parade tragedy, Children's hospital-based psychologists provided counseling to injured children, and created a mental health support line to address the trauma of the greater community. The support line was staffed by Children's mental health experts who provided guidance for families on how to discuss the tragedy with their children and connect them to additional resources, if needed.

Children’s mental and behavioral health services extend beyond southeastern Wisconsin with care provided at locations across the state. In the Fox Valley area, Children’s is proud to be a partner of Catalpa Health, a pediatric outpatient mental health and wellness organization, to provide therapy, psychology and psychiatry services in clinics and schools. With extended times to receive therapy services, Catalpa set up group therapy to help assess children and ensure those with urgent needs receive the support they need.

Children’s is helping ensure kids get the right care at the right time, no matter when their needs arise.

### Children’s Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## Forensic Nurse Examiners Follow the Survivor’s Lead

According to our most recent Community Health Needs Assessments, the rate of rape for Racine and Walworth counties were 12.3 and 26.40 (respectively) reports per 100,000 persons. However, sexual assault, rape and domestic violence are underreported.

Aurora Lakeland Medical Center and Aurora Medical Center – Burlington share a forensic nurse examiner (FNE) team. These specially trained nurses respond to the most sensitive needs of patients and provide trauma-informed care and can often provide guidance on how to navigate complicated situations.

One example includes a mother who presented in the Emergency Department (ED) at Aurora Medical Center – Burlington with her non-verbal child. The mother informed the ED staff that she believed her child was being abused by the child’s other parent while visiting but was unable to gain help through other agencies she reached out to.

The ED staff reached out to the FNE, who immediately connected with the mother. The mother explained that she has noticed for multiple years that her child would come home from the other parent’s house with bruising and behavioral changes. She tried working with local authorities but kept running into issues as the potential abuse was occurring in a different jurisdiction.

The FNE was able to take immediate action and contact representatives within local agencies that would be able to help coordinate help for the mother and her child. Within hours of her arrival to the ED, a case was opened on the mother’s behalf and the situation is being investigated. Meanwhile, the child can remain safely at home with the mother.

During 2021, the Forensic Nurse Examiners also:

- Provided 51 people with trauma-informed care in response to sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking.
- Referred 40 people to community partners for continued services and support.
- Conducted 124 community education, prevention, and outreach training sessions for 2,037 community members.

### Aurora Medical Center-Burlington and Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, Elkhorn

## Screening and Connecting Patients to Safe and Stable Housing: *Housing is Health* Program Expanded

It is well established that housing is one of the most significant social determinants of health. Understanding that safe, affordable, and stable housing is also the most complex and expensive social resource to navigate and secure for patients, Milwaukee’s four health systems – Advocate Aurora Health, Ascension Wisconsin, Children’s Wisconsin, and Froedtert Health – came together through the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership to create a housing navigation program: Housing is Health.

The Housing is Health program works in collaboration with Milwaukee County Housing Services and IMPACT Coordinated Entry to screen and refer homeless/vulnerably housed patients receiving ER or inpatient care for housing support. Navigators then help patients secure temporary housing, provide case management, secure supportive services, and aid in their ultimate transition to permanent housing stability.

While the program was initially designed to serve hospital patients, in 2020, it expanded to serve patients and families at Children’s Midtown primary care clinic. After experiencing positive results, the program was further extended into primary care clinics and is now in all five Milwaukee Federally Qualified Health Centers, located in low-income neighborhoods.

As of January 2022, Housing is Health has connected 242 patients to temporary housing and facilitated permanent housing for 120 patients across inpatient, ER, and primary care settings.

Funding for the program is provided by the Milwaukee-based health systems via their Shared Community Investment Fund, the Green Bay Packers Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Business Foundation on Health, the Medical Society of Milwaukee County, and the United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County.

### Milwaukee Health Care Partnership



Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Health Care Partnership

## Screen Free Week

A sedentary lifestyle can lead to unhealthy weight and has also been linked to behavioral health issues in children. Screen Free Week is held annually in May as a national movement to raise awareness and help parents decrease the time children spend on screens for entertainment. The week is spent learning to use non-screen related activities for entertainment to help decrease anxiety, depression, and sedentary lifestyle habits that are attributed to increased screen time.

As one activity within their hospital Implementation Strategy Plans to increase community wellness, this initiative is the third year the Aurora Medical Centers located in Washington and Ozaukee counties led this movement locally in their respective counties.

The event planning committee was formed and led by two Advocate Aurora Health community nurses in 2020 and supported by the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department. Each year the committee reaches out to local organizations like libraries, park departments, nature and outdoor recreation organizations, art museums, schools, and cities to provide opportunities to try new classes, craft kits, hiking, and activities these organizations already provide for free. Screen Free Week resources and educational materials are shared by schools and the organizations during the week and with activities for both parents and children.

Community participant numbers grew from just over 1,000 in both counties in 2021, to 2,600 participants in both counties in 2021. Over 2,000 parents, children, and other community members attended over 20 activities offered.

This is a collaborative effort and other local community partners include Froedtert Health Care, Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department, West Bend Community Memorial Library, Germantown Public Library, Kewaskum Public Library, Jack Russell Memorial Library Hartford, Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington County, Ozaukee Skateland, Riveredge Nature Center, Museum of Wisconsin Art West Bend, Pike Lake State Park, and Kettle Moraine YMCA.

## [Aurora Medical Center-Washington County, Hartland and Aurora Medical Center-Grafton](#)

## Ground-Breaking Partnership Aids Veterans

An innovative partnership between the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and a neighboring municipal fire department reaped big dividends in 2021—and likely saved the life of a veteran. The Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) program, established in 2020, involves the Milwaukee VA Emergency Department and the West Allis Fire Department.

“This is a first-in-the-nation relationship between VA and fire departments,” said Ben Thelen, nurse manager for the Milwaukee VA Emergency Department.

The program targets veterans who make numerous trips to the emergency department and seeks ways for them to better manage their health. It starts with specially trained paramedics who make house calls to designated veterans. These aren't emergency lights-and-sirens calls; instead, the paramedics are working proactively. They talk with the veterans about medications, check their surroundings and make sure they are in contact with the right resources.



*Milwaukee VA social worker Ann Baggett talks with Lt. A.J. Ottow of the Mobile Integrated Healthcare program with the West Allis Fire Department.*

In April 2021 the program saved an elderly veteran who was living in squalor and being preyed upon by neighbors and crooks. Lt. A.J. Ottow of the West Allis MIH team checked on the veteran and found “absolutely atrocious” living conditions. Ottow learned the veteran’s meals were being stolen and a woman was scamming him out of cash. Ottow contacted county authorities and got the veteran to the Milwaukee VA, where he was admitted to the hospital. Plans were started to get him into an assisted living facility.

Since the MIH was established, the partnership has shown big dividends: Thelen said unnecessary emergency department visits have been reduced by 50%.

### [Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Milwaukee](#)

## **Caring for Older Adults in Kenosha County**

Nurses Improving Care for Health system Elders (NICHE) imparts principles and tools to stimulate changes in clinical practice to achieve patient-centered nursing care for older adults in health care facilities. The vision of NICHE is that all older adults, age 65 and over, receive age-friendly, exemplary nursing care.

During 2021, 1,104 older adults were served by Aurora Medical Center-Kenosha NICHE-certified Senior Resource Nurses (SRNs) to ensure they received care that promotes function, autonomy, and dignity. Services provided include

home visits, clinic referrals, cognitive screens, and Aurora at Home referrals.

In addition to the care our senior resource nurses provided:

- 190 community members were educated on Advance Directives with 97 completing an Advance Directive
- 540 individuals also received family guidance and support services and 67 received medication management and safety education
- 100% of our Emergency Department patients aged 65 years and older were identified for screening with the Identification of Seniors at Risk (ISAR) tool. 5% of those screened were identified as “at-risk” and were referred for support services
- 141 group exercise classes were provided at the Kenosha Senior Center with an average attendance of 19 individuals per class; 25 new participants attended throughout the year

Our senior resource nurses remained connected with clients throughout the pandemic to ensure they could access their providers and other wellness resources virtually or by telephone while remaining safe in their homes.

### [Aurora Medical Center-Kenosha](#)

## **Investing in Students in the South Shore**

As the health care industry expands, many hospitals continue to fill open positions. Attracting individuals to the health care industry and properly preparing them for the future and encourage them to remain in practice is an important focus for all health care providers to address shortages and increase access for community members.

Aurora St. Luke’s South Shore has partnered with Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) to focus specifically on two training programs: phlebotomy and medical technology. Both programs aim to prepare students for careers in their respective fields. During training, students will perform blood draws, process specimens and complete lab procedures. Students are taught foundational information and practical skills through their on-campus learning and gain professional experiences at our hospital facility.

Experience, training, and skills are essential, but at the ACL lab in Aurora St. Luke’s South Shore, we also place an emphasis on workplace culture and job progression. We encourage students to visit labs where they are hoping to apply following graduation and introduce them to leaders in the field while they continue their training.

By providing these students with real-life experiences, we are preparing them to walk confidently into their new role excited to start a long career in health care.

### Aurora St. Luke's South Shore, Milwaukee

## Rogers Behavioral Health Opens Brown Deer Residential Care to Expand Access to Care

As part of its goal to increase access to mental health and addiction services, Rogers Behavioral Health recently opened a residential care center in Brown Deer.

This is the first time residential treatment is being offered in Brown Deer, where inpatient and outpatient mental health and addiction care are also provided. Along with Oconomowoc and West Allis, Brown Deer is the third Rogers location to serve residential patients.



*Rogers leaders and community representatives celebrated the opening of Brown Deer residential care on June 29, 2022.*

Connected to the inpatient hospital, the 24,000-square-foot addition accommodates 32 patients with separate space for adults and adolescents. Patients receive specialized treatment for depression and other mood disorders as well as underlying conditions such as anxiety and substance use disorders.

“It is our privilege to expand our residential services in Brown Deer as part of our high-quality, evidence-based treatment at this location,” said Amanda Boeke, PsyD, vice president of Residential Services. “Offering expanded residential treatment means more people can benefit from Rogers’ continuum of care with better clinical outcomes and overall patient experience. The new center also helps to alleviate the high demand we are experiencing across the System for specialized mental health care.”

In residential care, patients receive treatment on campus, typically for 30 to 90 days. They have more time and resources for the recovery process from traumatic events and complicated life circumstances.

With this expansion, Rogers operates three inpatient behavioral health hospitals, 17 residential programs, eight outpatient centers, and a supportive living facility in Wisconsin.

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Brown Deer

## Cancer Nurse Navigators Support the Whole Person

As part of Advocate Aurora Health, Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center offers the latest, most effective treatment options. Cancer care involves much more than the therapies that target their cancer, it means treating the whole person and supporting them along their journey.

Given the complexity of cancer care, people undergoing cancer treatments require additional support, including helping them understand the information their providers share and navigating health care logistics.

A Cancer Nurse Navigator (CNN) is a certified nurse whose clinical expertise, extensive experience and specialized training allows them to effectively enable patients and their loved ones to make informed decisions, CNNs guide patients through the entire cancer care process. Starting from diagnosis, a CNN helps patients overcome barriers to optimal care and links them to support services that are most appropriate to meet their individual needs, including community resources.

Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center CNNs served 2,830 patients in 2021. This includes providing referrals to 40 Advocate Aurora providers and 383 community partners. Additionally, the CNNs facilitate community education classes, complete screenings for community members and partner with local community-based agencies to provide cancer prevention education and outreach.

Through community education and screening events, we hope to minimize cancer risk and improve outcomes through early detection. When a diagnosis does occur, our CNNs are there to reduce barriers and support patients every step of the way.

### Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee

## Everyone is Welcome at the Lighthouse on Dewey

As a behavioral health hospital, Aurora Psychiatric Hospital frequently meets its patients for the first time when they feel they are at the lowest point in their lives. But that's why they are there, to help lift people out of those low points and start them on the road to recovery. Every step of the way they are encouraging them, helping them with their struggles and celebrating their successes.

The Lighthouse on Dewey is a stand-alone facility dedicated to addressing the physical, spiritual, and emotional effects of drug and alcohol addiction to build the foundation for life-long recovery. The Lighthouse on Dewey continues to serve as a non-clinical meeting space seven days a week to accommodate support groups serving individuals and their families through the journey to maintain sobriety.

In 2021, Lighthouse on Dewey hosted 44 support groups accommodating an average of 610 individuals weekly, resulting in 58 hours of facility use by community groups each week. Those groups represent many organizations including Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Heroin Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, Women for Sobriety, ALANON, Couples in Recovery, Family Dynamics, Parents of Addicted Children, Veterans groups, and more.

Regardless of how one has found the Lighthouse on Dewey or why they are there, they are always welcome.

[Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa](#)

## A Helping Hand in a New Land

Po Too understands the unique needs of the refugees who seek care at Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic. She knows them because she was one. She's a refugee program coordinator and her family lived through the civil war in Myanmar, the country formally known as Burma.

In 1997, they were forced to leave their village and she spent the next nine years in a refugee camp in Thailand. Her family was finally able to resettle to the United States in 2006, and they landed in Lake Geneva, WI. Po was just 14 years old.

"I don't know anyone who has worked harder than my parents," Po said. "The toughest part to overcome was the language barrier. It can be very isolating as a refugee."

Po's church sponsor helped her overcome that isolation and connect her family to local resources. That's why she's so passionate about her work now; she hopes to provide to other refugees the same kindness and care that was given to her.

"We must educate them about their health before conditions worsen. So, I help them schedule annual checkups, make sure they get vaccinations and most importantly, I try to have conversations about topics that might be taboo within various refugee communities."

Refugees are required by federal law to undergo health screenings within 30 days of entering the United States. The refugee program is managed through Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic and Aurora Sinai Medical Center serves as a screening and care site. The screenings include checking for infectious diseases and to assess each refugee's general health. They then help them utilize the health insurance they are provided through BadgerCare Plus, to connect with a primary care doctor and refer them to specialty care if needed. All these screening services are provided at no cost.

For Po, it's not just about providing health care, it's about helping to provide a forever home. "When I meet people who've just arrived and don't have family, I make sure they know they can call me if they need someone to talk to. I want them to be more independent in their new home."

[Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Milwaukee](#)

## ProHealth Care Provides Flu Vaccinations and Kits for Homelessness Awareness Week

ProHealth Waukesha Memorial Hospital partners with community-based agencies on a variety of programs. In October 2021, ProHealth provided health services and resources for people who experience homelessness as part of United Way's Homelessness Awareness Week.



Community outreach nurses Blanca Medina (left) and Jessica Kadow helped administer flu vaccinations at St. James Place in Waukesha.

Hundreds of basic-need kits and backpacks packed by ProHealth leaders were distributed at the Salvation Army,

Women's Center and Hope Center in Waukesha. A team of ProHealth nurses also provided 50 flu vaccinations and community health information at St. James Place, the Women's Center, Hope Center and Journey House Youth Center on Milwaukee's south side.

ProHealth helps combat homelessness by:

- Conducting community health needs assessments to identify the most significant needs of our community and prioritize community benefit efforts.
- Offering free social work services and clothing at discharge for emergency department patients who are homeless and in need.
- Volunteering at agencies that serve people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Delivering street outreach services, flu vaccinations, blood pressure and blood sugar screenings, and community health information as part of local community initiatives.
- Providing emergency support in response to requests from local shelters.

“We know that housing is an important social determinant of health,” said Sarah Butz, director of community benefit. “ProHealth’s support of this initiative is an example of how we continue to help improve community health beyond the walls of our hospitals and clinics.”

### ProHealth Care Waukesha Memorial Hospital

## Senior Wellness is a Priority in Waukesha County

Inadequate health literacy disproportionately affects older adults in the United States, which can negatively impact wellness. Improving health literacy is increasingly critical as information, choices, and decisions about health care and public health have become more complex. To address this in 2021, Aurora Medical Center - Summit introduced many community-facing programs to connect with older adults living in our community.

One example includes hospital team member participation in the aging and disability resource center (ADRC) Senior Health Fair on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Aurora Medical Center-Summit hosted a booth at the health fair and interacted with 56 older adults and caregivers interested in learning more about how to identify and prevent elder abuse. The booth was interactive, and the post-it notes on the trifold board are what people listed as things they are grateful for.

Some additional examples of hospital programming targeting older adults within the community include:

- Providing Stepping On, a high-level, evidence-based program proven to reduce falls and build confidence in older people
- Hosting the AARP Smart Driving, a program focused on teaching driving techniques that make a difference in the elder population by keeping them active, engaged in their communities and their homes. Seniors will learn safe driving strategies and refresh their knowledge of the latest rules and hazards of the road
- Providing Advanced Directives classes for community members

### Aurora Medical Center-Summit

## Community Coalition Supported by Rogers Behavioral Health Works to Reduce Stigma, Inspire Action

Rogers Behavioral Health supports the work of Wise Initiative for Stigma Elimination (WISE) in the community. Founded in Wisconsin, WISE is growing to be a national coalition of organizations and individuals building resilient and hopeful communities by promoting inclusion and support for all who are affected by mental health and addiction challenges.



More than 300 advocates attended an April symposium to discuss substantive action we can take to challenge stigma in our communities and to advance racial and mental health equity.

In collaboration with Rogers, WISE implements and advances evidence-based practices for stigma reduction. People with mental health challenges sharing their recovery experiences in a targeted, local, credible, and continuous way is the best-known way to reduce stigma. The coalition promotes the power of strategic contact with those in recovery to end stigma in schools, health care, congregations, workplaces, and wherever else people interact.

An executive committee and a planning committee comprised of community members guide topics and solicit speakers for four virtual quarterly meetings. Free and open to the public, the gatherings explore topics in the mental health field.

For instance, earlier this year, more than 300 community mental health advocates attended a symposium on A Call to Action: The Intersection of Race and Mental Health. Panel discussions included strengthening resources, diversity in the mental health workforce, disparity of reimbursement rates, and training of police officers and first responders.

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc

## ProHealth Care Supports Crisis Intervention Training for Law Enforcement Officers

ProHealth Oconomowoc Memorial Hospital partners with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department to provide mental health crisis intervention training for deputies. The training is designed to help people with mental health disorders or addictions access medical treatment before the criminal justice system needs to become involved.

About 90 law enforcement officers have received the team-based training through NAMI Wisconsin and NAMI Waukesha, which are aligned with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. The goal is to reduce incidents and injuries for individuals affected by mental health disorders or substance use. Officer and community safety are also benefits.



*During a Waukesha County Sheriff's Department training session, officers practiced responses for a scenario in which an individual appeared to be in distress.*

Oconomowoc Memorial's support for the training is an outgrowth of ProHealth's Community Health Needs Assessment, which identified substance abuse and access to care as top priorities.

"We know that mental health and substance abuse are closely linked," said Sarah Butz, ProHealth's director of community benefit. "This initiative helps to address both of these concerns in our community."

The 40-hour crisis intervention course includes:

- An overview of mental illnesses and symptoms.
- Education about de-escalating mental health crises safely and effectively.
- Presentations and discussions with people who are living with mental illness and their family members.
- Other interactive educational opportunities, including site visits and police ride-alongs.

The training is part of a community partnership that includes NAMI, the Waukesha County Heroin and Illicit Drug Task Force, law enforcement agencies, health care systems and providers, and community members living with mental illness.

### ProHealth Oconomowoc Memorial Hospital

## Fighting Dual Illness with Flu Vaccine Promotion

As flu season approached, providers at Aurora West Allis Medical Center urged people to get vaccinated. Although Advocate Aurora providers promote flu vaccinations every year, many providers agreed that it was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Providing community members with flu vaccines helped reduce the burden of flu illnesses on hospitals that were already working over capacity to meet the needs of COVID-19 patients. Receiving a flu vaccination also meant reducing flu risk for vulnerable populations, especially those already managing chronic health conditions.

In 2021, the Aurora West Allis Medical Center the West Allis-West Milwaukee Health Department to provide free flu clinics at food bank and church locations, including St. John's Church, First Lutheran Church, and Holy Assumption Food Pantry. The hospital's pharmacist administered the vaccinations at the clinic and served in this role as part of Advocate Aurora Health's system-level Health Equity mission and to support those community members most heavily impacted by COVID-19, including uninsured individuals.

### Aurora West Allis Medical Center

## Froedtert Hospital Earns Awards for Environmental Sustainability Performance

A focus on more sustainable operations supports healthier patients, staff and communities. Practice Greenhealth awarded Froedtert Hospital the 2022 Greenhealth Partner for Change Award and Greening the Operating Room Recognition Award for its commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability achievements.

Froedtert Hospital's achievements include increasing recycling and decreasing medical waste generation; increasing the percentage spent on sustainable procurement; decreasing energy use intensity (EUI) and increasing its Energy Star rating from the previous year; and signing the Cool Food Pledge, an international effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by offering more plant-based food choices.

Froedtert Hospital earned the 2021 Partner for Change Award and Environmental Excellence Award for its increased recycling volumes and other sustainability initiatives. Practice Greenhealth's Environmental Excellence Awards are the nation's premier recognition program for environmental performance in the health care sector.

Froedtert Hospital, Wauwatosa

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### Rogers Behavioral Health Grows, Develops Workforce Though Innovative Approaches

Rogers Behavioral Health is committed to growing and developing Wisconsin's health care workforce and does so in several creative ways.

For instance, Rogers launched the Master of Science in Nursing psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner program in partnership with Milwaukee School of Engineering's School of Nursing. Nine Rogers employees have been awarded scholarships since 2020, and the first cohort of students graduated in May.

Graduates conducted their final projects at Rogers, including creating a clinical supervision group to uplift nurses working on inpatient units at the West Allis hospital and piloting a clinical supervision group for RNs at the Brown Deer hospital who have experienced patient suicide.

Rogers has also implemented career ladders for nurses and therapists, among other roles, to provide growth opportunities and offer career development maps and other tools.

Additionally, Rogers distributes a monthly Career Pathways e-newsletter that shares career planning and development tips, profiles long-serving team members, and spotlights the career progression of growing employees.

In an effort to support a collaborative and inclusive culture, Rogers launched a One Rogers campaign this year to bring people together, strengthen relationships, and create a spirit of connectivity throughout our Wisconsin sites and locations in nine other states.

"The best part about Rogers is our dedicated team," said John Boyd, PsyD, president and CEO. "It is by connecting our minds, hearts, passions, and personal stories that we become stronger and, as a result, we create healthier environments, cultures, families and communities."

Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc



Talent Development

## Career Pathways Newsletter

September 2022



Produced by the Talent Development department, the Career Pathways e-newsletter highlights career path tips and success stories.

## Returning Citizens Initiative

Advocate Aurora Health's goal is to help people live well, and that means creating a workforce that is innovative and ready to change the future of health care for their patients, communities and each other.

As part of their systemwide recruiting strategy, Advocate Aurora Health proactively seeks out new dimensions of diversity to recruit and create inclusive spaces for new team members from all walks of life. This is the impetus for their Returning Citizens Initiative, which offers job opportunities for people with criminal convictions on their record. Through the program, Advocate Aurora Health educates their leadership about how to best support returning citizens. They develop strong community partnerships with organizations such as Center for Self-Sufficiency, Goodwill Workforce Connection and Milwaukee Jobs Work to provide resources, support and job opportunities for program participants. They help participants complete a Department of Human Services process that might allow them to work in health care if their prior conviction currently prevents it. They also reduce recidivism and boost household income for program participants. In 2021, Advocate Aurora hired 28 returning citizens through the initiative.

[Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee](#)

## Training the Next Generation of Pediatric Mental Health Therapists at Children's

Children's Wisconsin recognized that the pediatric mental and behavioral health care workforce needs to grow to meet the increasing needs of Wisconsin kids. That's why a goal was set to double the number of Children's mental health providers. To meet that need, new training models and fellowship programs were created.

The initial focus has been on the Therapist Fellowship Program, which supports future licensed therapists by providing a salary and health insurance while they complete their clinical training hours. This is funded through government grants, philanthropy and Children's investment. Twelve fellows completed their training within the last year and have accepted positions at Children's, with another 18 fellows currently in the program. While it typically takes around five years for prospective therapists to complete the 3,000 hours of state-required clinical training, Children's fellows are completing those hours in less than two years. Without this support and investment, most individuals need to work other jobs at the same time.

"I would absolutely not be where I am today if it weren't for this program," shared Jessica Kotsakis, APSW, a Children's program participant. "As a mother with a family to support, the time commitment alone would have made it impossible to pursue further licensure."

Through their work in this program, these therapists have been serving families statewide, caring for more than 3,600 families with more than 23,000 touch points across outpatient, school-based and primary care clinics.

[Children's Wisconsin, Milwaukee](#)

## Supporting the Future of Health Care Professionals

The Froedtert & MCW health network believes in the development of future health care professionals through student placement opportunities across the enterprise. These hands-on experiences support personal and professional growth and development by strengthening clinical competency, critical thinking, collaboration, clinical judgment and leadership skills.

### **Project SEARCH Builds Job Skills in Adults with Disabilities:**

Froedtert Health partners with Creative Employment Opportunities/TransCen Inc. and The Threshold Inc. to offer Project SEARCH at Froedtert Hospital and Froedtert West Bend Hospital. The internship program provides on-the-job training and skill development to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The two hospitals have trained about 100 interns and have hired about two dozen interns over the past eight years.

### **Medical Assistant Trainee Program Works to Solve Medical Assistant Shortage:**

Froedtert Health partners with the Center for Healthcare Careers of Southeastern Wisconsin and Employ Milwaukee to offer the Medical Assistant Trainee Program. The program provides an accelerated 14-week learning setting, paid tuition and training and job placement for graduates. A shortage of 1,466 medical assistants is projected in southeastern Wisconsin by 2025. This training program is working to strengthen the medical assistant pipeline.

### **LAUNCH Program Unites Health Care Mentors with High School Students:**

Froedtert & MCW staff mentor high school students interested in health care careers through LAUNCH, an Elmbrook School District program. Last year, 59 students were mentored by 16 staff members during weekly virtual meetings. The students and mentors worked together to solve real world problem statements, allowing the students to realize their strengths and passions and cultivate professional skills.

### **Mock Interviews Prepare High School Students for Jobs:**

Froedtert & MCW volunteers and the Milwaukee Bucks helped Carmen High School students prepare for future job opportunities by participating in Carmen Mock Interviews in spring 2021. Volunteers participated in more than 29 interviews over two months.

[Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin, Wauwatosa](#)

# Southern Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$369,289,881**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Supporting Good Neighbor Clinic is an Investment in Our Community

Between our four primary care clinics, 36-bed acute care 501(c)(3) hospital and Wellspring facility, Sauk Prairie Healthcare has been providing quality care to the more than 40,000 patients in our service area for 66 years. We know the responsibility we have as leaders in driving community health and ensuring everyone has equal access to quality care.

One way we show this is through our support of the Good Neighbor Clinic, a free, primary care clinic established in 1999 by the late Dr. Haakon Carlson. Dr. Carlson was a practicing physician of Sauk Prairie Hospital, and in retirement it became his mission to serve individuals in the community with no medical insurance. His mission carries on to this day. In addition to leasing clinic space at a reduced cost to the Good Neighbor Clinic, Sauk Prairie Healthcare provided more than \$239,000 in free medical services to the clinic's patients in 2021.

In 2017, that number was \$143,389, and our forecasted support this year is \$283,000—almost double the amount we provided five years ago.

[Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac](#)

### SSM Health Donates Equipment to Perry Family Free Clinic

The Perry Family Free Clinic is a primary care clinic that aims to serve uninsured and underinsured Black men in the Madison/Dane County area. The clinic is an extension of Aaron Perry's current Black Men's Wellness Center on Madison's west side, which SSM Health helped to launch in early 2020.

Located within a popular Black barbershop, JP's Hair Design, the wellness center provides health education, blood pressure checks, vaccine opportunities, and more to local men and boys. The goal of this initiative is to educate as many men as possible on their health and create a response where men will check on their health as often as they perform routine acts such as receiving haircuts. This model has been extremely successful in reaching Black men in an environment where they are comfortable and promote healthy life cycles by establishing trust and improving health outcomes.

SSM Health contributed funding and recycled equipment from the former Dean Medical Group clinic on Fish Hatchery Road toward the expansion to a full clinic next door to the barbershop. The Perry Family Free Clinic opened in February 2022 and continues to provide services to the community.

[SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital, Madison](#)

### UnityPoint Health-Meriter Partners with Local Church to Provide Free Vaccines, Blood Pressure Clinics

UnityPoint Health Meriter has partnered with Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Madison to offer free vaccine and blood pressure screening clinics, to better reach different populations within our community.

In this partnership, UnityPoint Health – Meriter has offered three free vaccine clinics that include annual regular and high-dose flu vaccines, as well as first, second and booster doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines. At our most recent clinic, the Bivalent COVID-19 Vaccine was included.

Through these vaccine clinics, we are working to address vaccine disparities in the Black community, by providing space for individuals in our community to receive vaccines in an easier way and offer education and space for questions for those who might be vaccine hesitant.

In addition to a variety of vaccine clinics, we have worked to include a clinic for free blood pressure screenings, where attendees could have their blood pressure checked, and

were educated on the importance of regular blood pressure screenings, and ways to manage an irregularity.

The clinics are always free, and appointments aren't necessary.

### UnityPoint Health-Meriter

## Subsidizing Health Insurance Premiums

When the Affordable Care Act was implemented in 2014, many area residents were left needing to purchase health insurance from the marketplace but unable to afford the premiums. UW Health recognized the need and created a fund to provide financial assistance to those people. Working with the United Way of Dane County and Unity Health Insurance (now known as Quartz), they established HealthConnect, a premium subsidy program for qualified Dane County residents.

More than 6,500 high-quality health insurance plans have been covered through HealthConnect since the program began in 2014. UW Health has contributed more than \$9 million over that time to cover the premium expenses, and the United Way of Dane County manages the fund.

HealthConnect participants frequently share how much they appreciate the program. Here are just a few comments from enrollees:

*"I was having a mental health crisis before HealthConnect, knowing that maintaining my physical health would ruin me financially. Now I can afford to be alive. THANK YOU!"*

*"I have received the best care under this plan. I have a serious condition which is better maintained than ever since enrolling in this plan."*

*"HealthConnect has helped me put some of my financial worries aside and concentrate on a living a happier lifestyle. I'm now able to pay off my debt and see my doctor on a regular basis to help with my family history of heart disease."*

### UW Health, Madison

## COVID-19 Efforts

### SSM Health Takes COVID-19 Vaccinations into Communities

To get COVID-19 vaccinations to essential workers like educators, farm, food service and other vital personnel, SSM Health put together a dedicated task force to develop in-community, mobile vaccination clinics. In tandem with dedicated colleagues at Dean Health Plan, SSM Health

partnered with schools, churches, merchants, grocers, manufacturers, restaurant associations and other community organizations to develop suitable and easily accessible on-site vaccination clinics across Wisconsin.



Gov. Tony Evers bumps elbows with staff at an SSM Health vaccine clinic.

SSM Health held its first one-day, on-site vaccination clinic on March 2, 2021, in Waunakee for 850 eligible education workers from the Waunakee Community and Sauk Prairie School Districts. A second mobile clinic followed just three days later, vaccinating 1,200 eligible Sun Prairie School personnel.

SSM Health supplied the appropriate vaccines and medical equipment as well as nursing, pharmacy, organizational and public relations support for each event. To better serve Latino communities, the organization also offered qualified Spanish-language interpreters. SSM Health supplemented the vaccination team with qualified vaccinators from area emergency services providers, school nurses and nursing students who all generously volunteered their time and expertise.

Since a two-dose series was required by both Moderna and Pfizer for full COVID-19 vaccination, the mobile vaccination team had to schedule both initial and second dose vaccinations within the appropriate timeframe. This meant arranging two on-site clinics at most of the community locations and arranging for adequate resources and personnel.

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conferred vaccination eligibility on new populations of adults and children, the health care team began to offer mobile clinics for them, paying particular attention to underserved communities. In April, SSM Health was fortunate to receive a \$100,000 grant through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services which enabled it to add two temporary positions to help coordinate its growing mobile vaccination efforts.

In May of 2021, Governor Tony Evers visited a clinic held in collaboration with the Urban League of Greater Madison. Thanks to the volunteer vaccinators, the Sable Flames, a non-profit group of Black firefighters, SSM Health was able to vaccinate 73 people that day.

Over the course of the next 19 months, SSM Health held 133 clinics to provide more 33,781 COVID-19 vaccine doses. These on-site clinics were held at a wide variety of locations across Wisconsin, including schools, churches, farmers markets, parks, libraries, grocery stores, restaurants, resorts, factories, farms, warehouses, a theatre and a Madison-area television station.

When COVID-19 vaccines became more widely available, the efforts of the mobile vaccination team slowed but did not stop. The team continues to provide vaccinations in some area schools and, working with other health care providers, has expanded vaccination efforts to include the other common childhood vaccinations, (flu, Tdap, HPV and Meningococcal), that so many youngsters missed during the height of the pandemic.

[SSM Health Wisconsin Region, Madison](#)

## Equitable Vaccine Distribution

Equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution has been a top priority for UW Health. As vaccines were rolling out to the general public, UW Health worked not only to distribute vaccinations to as many patients as possible, but the health system took specific, meaningful steps to reach communities of color.



*UW Health vaccine clinic for Latinx community members*

UW Health hired community health workers specifically from the Black/African American, Latinx and Hmong communities and created a workflow within Epic for the community health workers to identify medically homeed patients from those communities. The community health workers proactively called those patients to answer questions and offer COVID-19

vaccine appointments. The UW Health COVID-19 vaccine community health workers reached over 4,300 unique patients from March 2021 through June 2022.

UW Health also partnered with community organizations serving communities of color for population-specific vaccination clinics. On one day in April, the health system partnered with the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce to vaccinate almost 200 essential workers in Dane County.

UW Health partnered with many other community groups to hold COVID-19 vaccination clinics across Dane County. In addition to dedicated vaccine equity clinics, UW Health provided culturally and linguistically relevant information about COVID-19 vaccines to ensure that communities of color had access to reliable information and feel empowered to make informed decisions related to vaccination.

[UW Health, Madison](#)

## Health Equity

### COVID Testing Aimed at the Hispanic Population Increases Access to Health Care by Decreasing Barriers

A language barrier can often be a reason individuals in our ESL-speaking population do not seek out help, health care, or other essential services. Pair that with a low-income population, and other challenges such as transportation, childcare needs and/or access and affordability to obtaining proper identification and those numbers drop even more.

We knew there had to be a solution. Based on demographic information, Sauk Prairie Healthcare—in conjunction with Sauk County Health Department—planned and held two COVID-19 vaccine clinics at a mobile home development just on the outskirts of town. If they could not get to Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Sauk Prairie Healthcare would go to them and make the process as easy as possible.

Two bilingual providers were brought in to administer the vaccinations, and bilingual signage and vaccination cards (with dates for the second dose) were provided. A free food cart was onsite for people to enjoy during the required 15-minute waiting period following the vaccine.

“We went out there with the feeling that even if we only gave one person a vaccination, it was a success,” said Sauk Prairie Healthcare Business Development Analyst Brenda Humbracht. “And we did have people show up.”

From seniors to teens, Humbracht said people were very appreciative of the effort.



*Sauk Prairie Healthcare, in conjunction with Sauk County Health Department, held a free COVID-19 vaccination clinic at a mobile home community as a way to remove health equity barriers.*

“A lot of them stuck around and chatted with our providers, and visited the food cart,” she said. “In the end we had a nice mix of people who got vaccinated, ate, and visited with one another. It was a nice, socially distant outdoor event.”

**Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac**

## ConnectRx Wisconsin Addresses Maternal/Fetal Health Disparities

In April 2022, SSM Health joined other area health care organizations as members of the Dane County Health Council to launch ConnectRx Wisconsin, a system dedicated to supporting Black pregnant women and birthing persons to gain greater access to health care and family-stabilizing resources.

The program aligns with the reproductive justice priority listed in SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Madison’s 2022-2024 Community Health Needs Assessment.

ConnectRx seeks to reduce Wisconsin’s high racial disparity regarding infant mortality, as the state currently has one of the highest disparities in the country when it comes to birth outcomes. The program deploys a care coordination system across Dane County that helps to connect Black women to resources and fill unmet needs to promote successful births and improve overall birth outcomes in the state.

The initiative stems from a 2017 community assessment called Saving Our Babies, which outlined the growing racial disparity gap in Dane County and called for immediate action. Through ConnectRx, pregnant women can receive access to community health workers, doulas, and various programs focused on addressing the social determinants of health.

**SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital, Madison**

## Intentional Outreach to Vaccinate Latinx Community

In the days before any vaccines received an emergency use authorization, UW Health was already working on plans to reach the local Latinx community. They prioritized Latinx individuals within those early eligible populations and crafted straight-forward, direct messages about the safety and the effectiveness of the vaccines. But they knew from the beginning that was not going to be enough.



*UW Health staff at a COVID-19 vaccine clinic for Latinx community members*

Vaccines need to be offered in clinics and locations that are known and trusted within the community, not just larger hospitals and clinics. Early on, UW Health operationalized a smaller clinic serving many of their Latinx patients to administer the vaccine. They worked with community groups such as the Latino Health Council of Dane County, the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce and Centro Hispano of Dane County to schedule vaccination days at this well-known and trusted clinic for the Latinx community. Just as important as location is having a trusted messenger. In addition to partnerships with Latinx community groups, they worked with one of UW Health’s Latinx primary care physicians to deliver multimedia messages to the community in Spanish.

This multi-layered approach to vaccine messaging and outreach has produced positive results. Dane County had one of the nation’s highest rates of vaccination in the Latinx

community, in part because UW Health grounded their campaign firmly in the community.

UW Health, Madison

### *Hospital-supported Initiatives*

## **Mental Health First Aid Aims to Increase Mental Health Literacy**

As part of its effort to focus on Mental Health and Substance Abuse priorities, Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital in Portage launched free Mental Health First Aid programs to the community.

This groundbreaking eight-hour training course gives people the tools to identify when someone might be struggling with a mental health or substance use problem and to connect them with appropriate support and resources when necessary.

“Unlike physical conditions, symptoms of mental health and substance use problems can be difficult to detect,” says Kari Due, community health improvement lead at Aspirus Divine Savior. “For friends and family members, it can be hard to know when and how to step in. Mental Health First Aid is designed to provide a framework to empower people to seek mental health services.”

Just as CPR helps even those without clinical training assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid prepares participants to interact with a person experiencing a mental health crisis. Mental Health First Aiders learn a five-step action plan that guides them through the process of reaching out and offering appropriate support.

Hospital employees were also included in the training to foster discussion and interaction amongst the facility and various community agencies.

Mental Health First Aid is just one effort focusing on mental health and substance abuse at Aspirus Divine Savior. They also partner with Prevention and Response of Columbia County to distribute medication lock boxes to patients. A medication drop box designed to ensure proper disposal of unwanted medications is also located at the hospital’s main entrance to provide access to anyone in the community.

Aspirus Divine Savior is also the largest referral source for the ED2 Recovery Program in the area and have representation on several local Substance Abuse and Mental Health coalitions to expand and coordinate efforts in the community.

Aspirus Divine Savior Hospital, Portage

## **Reedsburg Area Medical Center Supports Reach Out & Read Program**

Reedsburg Area Medical Center was thrilled to donate funds that were raised through the sale of equipment no longer needed in the facility. These funds were used to purchase books for the Reach Out and Read program, which are distributed to families – free of charge – by providers at the RAMC Physicians Group during patient well-child visits. During well-child visits, RAMC providers talk with parents about the benefits of reading aloud and sharing a love of books with their young children.



RAMC's Dr. Joanna Laukant reads with two young patients

Parents are shown how to hold books to best engage their child and how to interact with the text and images to help the child follow along. RAMC providers share advice for talking about stories with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and families gain a deeper understanding of why they should make reading a daily habit. Parents are encouraged to cuddle up with their young ones and enjoy an age-appropriate book.

At RAMC, doctors, nurse practitioners, and other medical professionals incorporate Reach Out and Read's evidence-based, three-part model into regular pediatric checkups:

- Trained doctors and nurses speak with parents about the importance of reading aloud, starting in infancy.
- At each regular checkup from six months through five years of age, the child receives a new book to take home, free of charge.
- We also create literacy-rich environments that include gently used books for waiting room use, as well as providing books to siblings.

Research shows that as a result of this three-part intervention at the doctor's office, parents become more engaged and read to their children more often at home. The time spent reading translates into quantifiable gains: research studies show that during the preschool years, children served by Reach Out and Read score three to six months ahead of their non-Reach Out and Read peers on vocabulary tests. These early foundational language skills help propel children on a path of success when they enter school.

Dr. Laukant has been with RAMC since 1999 and has overseen the Reach Out and Read program since 2014 at its inception.

### Reedsburg Area Medical Center, Reedsburg

## Hands on Health: Fighting Obesity One Class at a Time

Through Edgerton Hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment, it was evident that our community struggles with weight management. The hospital has made it our mission to address this situation and give the community the tools needed to combat this issue head on. In January of 2022, the Edgerton Hospital Foundation accepted a grant from the Edgerton Community Fund's Fall 2021 Grant Cycle of the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin, Inc. The money awarded has helped to support new Edgerton Hospital educational programming aimed directly at meeting various needs of the community, including obesity and mental health.

Our "Hands on Health" program was designed to reduce obesity rates by increasing the community's access to healthy food, regardless of age, mobility, or income. In addition,

class participants will experience the secondary effects of gardening, including reductions in depression, anxiety, and body mass index; and increases in quality of life and sense of community.

Through the "Hands on Health" program, Edgerton Hospital has executed a series of free community programs including growing vegetables in small spaces, accessible gardening, and gardening with children. In addition, using funds from the grant, large bins were purchased to plant vegetables and herbs. The bins were located right outside the hospital's café, giving true meaning to "farm-to-table." Throughout the summer and growing season, the hospital's executive chef has used this garden produce in the hospital's café to offer patients, staff, and visitors fresh food grown right on site! This fresh food was also used for educational cooking classes.

The free educational classes offered to the community included:

- Accessible Gardens
- Cooking for Kids
- Cooking with Herbs
- Gardening for Kids
- Saucing & Spicing Seasonal Veggies
- Veggies - Containers & Small Spaces

It is our hope that by providing the community with free education regarding healthy eating, they will be more likely to take advantage of the opportunity and gain the needed knowledge to live longer, healthier lives.

### Edgerton Hospital & Health Services, Edgerton



Edgerton Hospital's Executive Chef, Joshua Ciafullo, provided a hands-on cooking class for local youth.

## Improving Diabetes Care for Healthier Communities

Over the last three years, Fort HealthCare (FHC) has been working on the Improving Diabetes for Healthier Communities program. The program was made possible by a grant through the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) awarded to FHC through its Small Health Care Provider Quality Improvement Program.

Improving Diabetes for Healthier Communities added Comprehensive Care Management (CCM) and a teleophthalmology service. Other programs and services include advancing the Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES) program and ambulatory pharmacy services.

The CCM program provides patients with additional care and assistance between clinic visits with their providers to help them manage their diseases and improve their health outcomes. During the grant period, over 240 patients were enrolled (157 of those living with diabetes).

The teleophthalmology service began screening for diabetic retinopathy with one retinal imaging camera and has since expanded to three cameras in the FHC service area. A total of 407 eye screenings were completed, which resulted in a 38.3% finding rate for diabetic eye disease, cataracts, or other eye issues.

The DSMES program was advanced to improve patient engagement rates. FHC also extended ambulatory pharmacy services to advance a team-based approach for diabetes care.

Fort HealthCare was also able to improve behavioral health screenings and collection and analysis of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), which help identify social needs that may impact a patient's ability to manage their health. Today all patients are screened for depression and suicide risk using the appropriate screening tool in primary care clinics. FHC will continue efforts and services made through the Improving Diabetes for Healthier Communities program after the grant period.

**Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson**

## Grant Regional Health Center Partners with Local Business for Aquatic Program Success

In September of 2021, team members at Grant Regional Health Center dipped their toes in the water with a simple plan to utilize a highly skilled instructor to begin aquatic exercise classes at the brand-new pool at the Sleep Inn & Suites in Lancaster, WI. When the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health had the opportunity to provide funds for programs addressing obesity, the group decided to take the chance and go for it. The program started with one class offering, and

before the first day of the program, grew to two full classes. By early 2022 the class had grown to five, full, bi-weekly classes—with a waitlist of eager participants.



*Aqua Fitness began with around 15 participants and has grown to over 85 participants. Some of the morning class participants are pictured above.*

Participants have found the program affordable and fun—but above all they have shown outstanding improvements in their health. This low-impact exercise option provides benefits that are far more difficult to achieve in traditional exercise activities. Aside from weight loss, increased range of motion, and reduced chronic pain, participants keep coming back for the friendships and comradery they have become accustomed to. The class helps participants overcome another major obstacle we face in the Midwest—the class is not dependent on weather due to the use of the indoor pool and classes are able to continue year-round. The nature of this class is inclusive to various levels of literacy and initial physical fitness level. Throughout the early months of Aqua Fitness, Grant Regional was conducting their Community Health Needs Assessment. When complete, the results further confirmed that this class met many of the unmet needs and potential needs for improvement in the community.

We continue to document and measure our progress through a survey process in which we asked a number of our participants several questions related to the aquatic fitness program. The most recent initial survey yielded the following results from participants who responded:

- 70% reported increased strength
- 80% reported increased Endurance
- 80% reported improved Balance
- 94% improved range of mobility
- 80% Reported benefit of socialization and relationships built with other participants
- 100% reported Aquatic Fitness was easier on their joints than other exercise activities they did

Grant Regional Health Center plans to continue the program as long as there is interest and recently received the Community Engagement Award through Quarles & Brandy, LLP and Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative to help fund the program moving forward.

**Grant Regional Health Center, Lancaster**

## Stir It Up! Program Aims to Teach Kids About Nutrition While Exposing Them to New Healthy Foods

With obesity rates high among American youth and the consumption rates of fruits and vegetables low, Sauk Prairie Healthcare decided it was high time to stir things up.

The Stir It Up! program is a program funded by Sauk Prairie Healthcare, which partners with several local schools to bring more awareness about the fruits and vegetables available to them. During the school year Isaac Hoffmaster, a clinical dietician with Sauk Prairie Healthcare, visits Tower Rock Elementary School fourth graders once a month to introduce students to a variety of fruits and vegetables in a fun and engaging way.



*Stir it Up! program brings nutrition education into the schools.*

“We introduce the kids to fruits and vegetables through different recipes and combinations, and teach the kids about nutrition,” Hoffmaster said. “The recipes we share feature simple preparation and are not labor intensive; these are recipes designed so the student can try it at home with a parent.”

Success is measured through a survey based on the amount of exposure the kids have to different varieties. “It’s not about whether or not they liked a particular fruit or vegetable,” Hoffmaster said, “But rather what they have tried or what they have a willingness to try.”

The program has been so successful that it is being expanded to another school, an after-school program and summer school.

Hoffmaster said it has been amazing to see kids try something new and enjoy it. “So much of it is about one kid seeing another try something, so they decide to try it, too,” Hoffmaster said. “They see that it is OK to try new things.”

**Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac**

## SSM Health Monroe Hospital Provides Food for Those in Immediate Need

To shorten the wait time for patients needing access to food, SSM Health Monroe Hospital and SSM Health Monroe Clinic Medical Group created an onsite food closet.

During appointments with patients in primary care, pediatrics or behavioral health, those who identify as food insecure are given a slip to redeem for an immediate-need food bag.

The bags are filled with non-perishable food items provided through a partnership with Green Cares Food Pantry in Monticello, Wisconsin. The bags also include printed resources in English and Spanish with local food pantry information and other important community resources. In addition, SSM Health shares hiring information for entry-level positions at its facilities.



*SSM Health Monroe Hospital food closet bags are ready to be given to food insecure patients.*

“The food closet gives us an opportunity to give our food insecure patients assistance immediately,” shared Community Health Specialist at SSM Health Monroe Hospital Tammie Jamiska. “The bags help them get through a couple days until they can establish with a local food pantry.”

SSM Health debuted the food pantry in Monroe in August 2022 and has expanded to include four more clinics in Wisconsin. Plans are in progress to also offer this program in additional departments in Monroe, as well as five clinic locations in Illinois.

Since launching, more than 25 patients have received immediate-need food bags.

### SSM Health Monroe Hospital, Monroe

## HungerCare Wellness Program a Collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank

Upland Hills Health's Community Health Needs Assessment indicated a need to focus on preventive health and wellness. The implementation plan included a goal to launch a Diabetes Wellness Program in partnership with Second Harvest Foodbank, providing monthly educational handouts and recipes in conjunction with the Diabetes Wellness Program. The collaborative effort began in 2019 when Upland Hills Health provided the Dodgeville location and staff healthy food to distribute, provided by Second Harvest Foodbank. These efforts stopped for two years during the pandemic. Fortunately, dedicated staff restarted food distribution in the summer of 2022.

Health care staff in Dodgeville re-established a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank to support the health of patients with diabetes and/or heart disease that may also be experiencing food insecurity. The HungerCare Wellness Program is a 12-month program that provides monthly food boxes and wellness education. Each month, enrolled participants receive nutrition-tailored food boxes, meal-kit style recipe cards, resources and wellness tips—all at no cost. In the first month, 21 participants took part in the drive-thru style event. Each person enrolled received about 30 pounds of food. This included diabetic-friendly and heart healthy fresh, frozen, and dry goods. So many smiles were shared. The program continues to grow.

### Upland Hills Health, Dodgeville

## SSM Health St. Clare Hospital-Baraboo donates to Baraboo Area Homeless Shelter

In early 2022, SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo was approached by the Baraboo Area Homeless Shelter, a local organization that provides shelter and comprehensive case management services to persons experiencing homelessness in the surrounding area, to help support shelter operations.

In April, SSM Health donated \$50,000 to the homeless shelter. This gift supports both organizations' missions to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable by increasing access to housing and immediate shelter for those experiencing homelessness in the Baraboo area, leading to better health outcomes, both physically and emotionally.



Baraboo Area Homeless Shelter leaders and staff accept donation from SSM Health St. Clare Hospital-Baraboo

The donation is being used to support the purchase of the current Baraboo Area Homeless Shelter building, to fund supplemental affordable rental grants for current clients, and to provide funding for staff salary and benefits in 2022.

### SSM Health St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo

## Collaborative Care Model Expands Behavioral Health Services

UW Health's last two community health needs assessments highlighted the need for mental health services. Based on this identified need, UW Health started working in 2017 on supporting all patients in primary care with their mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic put the program expansion on hold for some time, but now the Adult Collaborative Care program is in all UW Health family medicine and general internal medicine clinic sites.

Collaborative Care is an innovative care model providing more access to team-based, integrated behavioral health care. These UW Health clinics have at least one position for a dedicated behavioral health clinician on site to provide short-term therapy services to patients ages 18 and over with diagnoses of depression and anxiety.

The Pediatric Collaborative Care program started rolling out services to patients ages 4-17 with depression and anxiety diagnoses in June 2021. Expansion continues, and it is anticipated that all family medicine clinics will have these services available by spring 2023. Future roll outs will include patients ages 4-17 with a diagnosis of ADHD.

### UW Health, Madison

## SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Janesville Collaborates on Hygiene Kits for Local Youth

During the summer of 2022, St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville was approached by Youth2Youth 4 Change, a local student group that focuses on reducing substance abuse, to collaborate on the creation of hygiene kits for individuals experiencing extreme poverty or homelessness.

The project's concept was inspired by a need discovered from student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. SSM Health and Youth2Youth 4 Change partnered to host a supply drive. Over a two-week period, they collected more than 300 toothbrushes, 150 bars of soap, several large containers of laundry pods, shampoo, conditioner, feminine hygiene products and much more.



SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Janesville and Youth2Youth 4 Change leaders with donated items for hygiene kits.

Youth2Youth 4 Change students then put together more than 100 hygiene kits. They have created a distribution system to share the kits whenever and wherever they are needed.

[SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital – Janesville](#)

## Stoughton Health and Stoughton Library Team Up to Support Girls' After School Program

Resilience training helps teens cope with life challenges and obstacles in a healthy manner. Learning how to tap into strengths and support systems guides teens to make positive choices.

Girl-2-Girl (G2G) is an after-school program for girls in grades 6-12 designed to encourage development of strength,

confidence, honesty, and service by creating a close-knit community where girls can discover and celebrate their true selves.



Teens working together in the local Girl-2-Girl (G2G) program.

Stoughton Health and the Stoughton Library teamed up to support G2G through a book donation. With resilience as the topic of the month of May, they chose, "The Resilient Teen: 10 key skills to bounce back from setbacks & turn stress into success," by Sheela Raja. Stoughton Health also donated a copy for the library's collection.

Past G2G mentor, Tracy Markle, shared that benefits of programs like this one go well beyond the time the teen is in the program. Healthy relationships, strong character, and advocacy follows them into their college years and beyond.

[Stoughton Health, Stoughton](#)

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### RAMC Career Fair and Scholarship Opportunities!

Reedsburg Area Medical Center (RAMC) held their very first career fair in September. The RAMC Career Fair was open to all ages and populations, and the goal was to provide those in attendance with some additional information and opportunities for simulated, hands-on experiences in the following fields:

- Medical Laboratory Technician
- Nursing
- Respiratory Therapy
- Surgical Technologist

In addition to the Career Fair, RAMC is also offering several opportunities for fully paid scholarships for four individuals who are interested in any of the four career fields mentioned above. The fully paid scholarship will provide funding for the program and any required books and materials needed for the course, in exchange for a two-year commitment to work at RAMC in the chosen field when the student has graduated from the program.



### Reedsburg Area Medical Center, Reedsburg

## HOPE

UW Health is committed to cultivating the future health care workforce through a variety of educational and training programs and opportunities. UW Health's Career Pathways Program proactively works to address projected workforce shortages, build internal and external pathways for specific health care careers, and build a more diverse UW Health workforce through strategic partnerships.

One Career Pathways program is Health Occupations and Professions Exploration (HOPE), a one-day seminar that is designed to offer under-represented groups of high school students the opportunity to learn about more than 40 specific careers in health care with the guidance of a college mentor. Students involved in programs with local non-profit partners are invited to attend the day-long Saturday seminar.

During the sessions, students and their mentors hear from and have a chance to network with speakers from UW Health who are working in health care careers. Students and mentors also take part in hands-on and curricular activities to aid them in becoming familiar with the specific health care careers. The HOPE session concludes with the students completing a "road map" into the career in which they are most interested. The "road map" includes mapping out a current academic plan as well as a plan for post-secondary education and training.

After completing a HOPE session, students are eligible to sign up for a free CPR certification course, apply for job shadowing opportunities at UW Health and apply for summer internships at UW Health.

UW Health, Madison

## Recruiting at all Ages

Southwest Health and Southwest Technical College have teamed up to encourage potential and incoming students to consider a career in health care. After the disruption of COVID-19, health care faces a historic challenge in attracting, developing, and retaining a workforce. Our organizations have engaged with audiences at different education and age levels to encourage them to think about health care when deciding on their career.

During TechTrek, area students entering grades 7-9 participated in Southwest Technical College's week-long day camp to explore technical careers. Southwest Health sponsored all medical field classes for the students. Courses included Surgical Exploration, Fire & EMS Response, At the Heart of Medical Assisting, and Microscopy. Our sponsorship included covering the \$50 class fee and giveaways. This program gets kids excited about health care. After the program, we received feedback from the instructors, facilitators, and students.



CMA Matilyn Terpstra practicing her skills in labs

*"Thank you so much for covering the cost of my TechTrek session. I greatly appreciate your support for TechTrek. Thank you!" - Abilene*

Southwest Health and five other area hospitals all signed an agreement pledging \$75,000 over the next three years to expand the Southwest Tech Associate Degree Nursing course. With the support of Southwest Health and other area hospitals, increased enrollment and graduation goes from once a year to twice, with students enrolling both in August and January.

Southwest Health has engaged with the area audience to promote health care. Meeting the area’s need for health care professionals is going to take a continuous effort. These programs are just two steps toward creating a healthier Southwest Wisconsin.

### Southwest Health, Platteville

## Sauk Prairie Healthcare Cares About Developing People

At Sauk Prairie Healthcare, we believe the wellness of our providers is directly linked to the delivery of high-quality patient care that our community deserves. That’s why we support our staff in their personal and professional journey, from providing opportunities to participate in leadership, educational and other professional training programs.



*This year, Sauk Prairie Healthcare received first place in four categories for a local media contest, including Best Place to Work. To us, that means our employees feel we are doing something right!*

In 2022 Sauk Prairie Healthcare Foundation committed \$50,000 to employees to further their education and training. We also recognize the importance of workplace culture, and regularly celebrate the achievements of our employees, work milestones and birthdays. Peers are encouraged to support and encourage one another through our PRIDE program, and our DAISY Award honors compassionate care and extraordinary nurses.

We stress work-life balance and incentivize our team for participating in healthy activities through our Wellness 4 Life journey. We also provide our employees with a free,

individual membership to our fitness facility and the Calm app. When you put these altogether, Sauk Prairie Healthcare invests a lot in its people!

### Sauk Prairie Healthcare, Prairie du Sac

## SSM Health Innovates, Collaborates to Grow and Develop Future Caregivers

SSM Health is diligently working to grow our team, adding new pipelines for the next generation of health care professionals. In 2022, the organization committed additional personnel to our recruitment team, offered incentives to existing staff for recruiting assistance and developed a formalized college recruitment program within each of SSM Health’s four states—Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and Oklahoma.

Its mentor apprenticeship program for people with disabilities in partnership with the Fond du Lac and Madison Metropolitan School Districts was recognized in 2022 with an Exemplary Employer Award by the state’s Department of Workforce Development.

SSM Health also began a unique “extern program” to connect with future nurses while they are pursuing their degrees to provide additional in-hospital training on patient floors, emergency rooms, labor and delivery and behavioral departments. These student externs work a flexible, part-time schedule to get hands-on experience under nurse preceptor supervision concurrent with their classroom work.



*Four SSM Health medical assistant students pose for a photo*

In March of 2022, the health care provider dedicated a new nursing education center at SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital-Madison, which, thanks to technological equipment, will allow for sharing educational programming across our entire system. The new space offers 24/7 access to RQI training

equipment and a simulated patient room so clinicians can complete hands-on training with manikins before working with actual patients.

In addition to its existing scholarship and tuition reimbursement programs, SSM Health also established a new nursing education ladder designed to encourage and support caregivers at every level as they continue their to build their skills, certifications and educational credentials.

Over the last few years, the organization offered paid educational opportunities for new recruits and existing employees interested in becoming certified nursing assistants or medical assistants in partnership with Madison College. Students agreed to a fixed period of employment with SSM Health upon successful completion of the program and incurred no out-of-pocket costs to participate.

The medical assistant program is a year-long commitment and includes classroom coursework, job shadowing and hands-on training and results in paid positions with SSM Health. The certified nursing assistant (CNA) program includes three to four weeks of online coursework coupled with on-the-job training in the locations where students will work upon graduation from the program.

Thanks to funding from a Wisconsin Fast Forward Grant, there was no cost for students to enroll in the most recent CNA program, which opened doors to those who might normally have had barriers due to a lower socioeconomic status. As part of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion commitment to improve the diversity of its workforce, SSM Health also set and exceeded its goal to help employ more people of color through this program. At least 40% of the newest CNA recruits are ethnically diverse and now have a career pathway in health care.

[SSM Health Wisconsin Region, Madison](#)

## UnityPoint Health – Meriter Announces Jeff Levy Education Center

UnityPoint Health-Meriter was incredibly excited to announce the Jeff Levy Education Center, which will serve as hub for many critical health care training and continuing education programs.

The country is facing a mounting health care worker shortage and Meriter recognizes the important role we, as a community health care system, can play in helping to address this problem in our region.

Meriter seeks to implement solutions designed to address this issue. The Jeff Levy Education Center is important to this

work, providing space for Meriter’s critical nursing education program; Pathways programs (educational programming and practical training offered through Meriter that will add individuals to clinical roles; community education; and more.

## Jeff Levy Education Center UnityPoint Health - Meriter



*A rendering of what classrooms inside the Jeff Levy Education Center will look like.*

“We absolutely must provide the same standard of care, but I fear that if the shortage grows, the vacancies will exponentially increase because the staff who are still here will be asked to do more with less help,” said Renee Bukovich, manager of nursing education at UnityPoint Health – Meriter.

The Jeff Levy Education Center will also house many aspects of Meriter’s new team member on-boarding processes and continuing education and training for current team members.

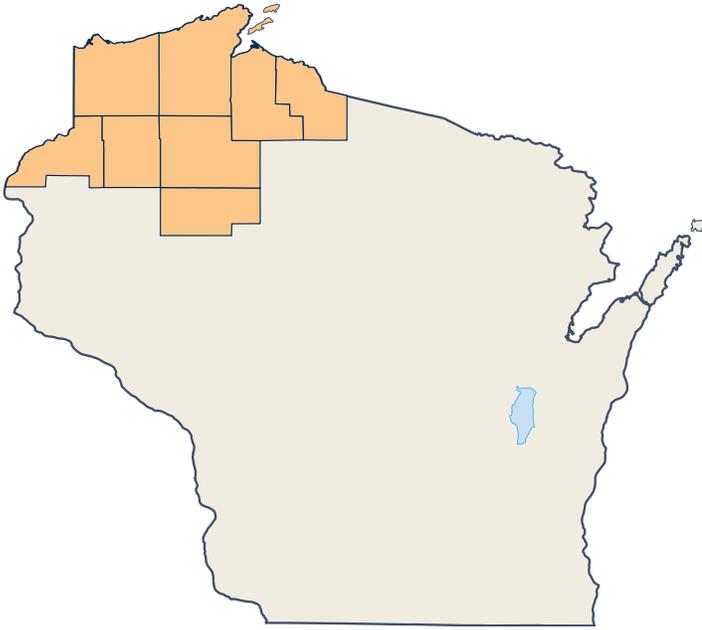
The Jeff Levy Education Center was made possible thanks, in large part, to generous lead gift by community member, Jeff Levy and the dedicated work of the Meriter Foundation.

The goals of the Jeff Levy Education Center include:

- Diversify our health care workforce.
- Accelerate getting new care team members to the patient bedside.
- Expand the talent pool, commensurate with increasing patient volumes.
- Advance team members through career support and growth opportunities.

[UnityPoint Health-Meriter, Madison](#)

# Vikingland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$24,203,824**

## *Hospital-Supported Initiatives*

### **Burnett Medical Center Assesses Behavioral Health Initiative**

The 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment has identified behavioral health to be Burnett County’s second most significant health need. Burnett Medical Center (BMC) is addressing the growing problem by engaging with Senior Life Solutions, a program dedicated to addressing the emotional and behavioral health of adults typically over the age of 65.

Aging brings many joys—more time with family and freedom in retirement—but our older years can also bring difficult life transitions including the loss of loved ones and stress from age-related health concerns. Therefore, BMC is exploring to implement Senior Life Solutions, an intensive outpatient group therapy program designed to meet the unique needs of adults, who are typically 65 years of age and older, and experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety often related to aging. Following an individual assessment, patients meet up to three times per week in a supportive, encouraging group setting.

The program staff would include a board-certified psychiatrist, licensed mental health counselor, a registered nurse, and other professionals dedicated to the emotional well-being of the seniors in our community.

Burnett County is continuing to age; according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county’s median age is approximately 53 years old. By working to address this health need, BMC would increase the county’s access to behavioral health services. BMC’s hope is to be a resource for community members and ultimately help improve behavioral health, so our community is a healthier place to live.

**Burnett Medical Center, Grantsburg**

### **Recovery Resources Under One Roof**

In early 2019, Memorial Medical Center (MMC) in rural northern Wisconsin helped to launch a recovery drop-in center to provide a safe, sober and welcoming environment for the people in the community who were struggling with addiction.



*The Partners in Recovery Center is located at 401 Lakeshore Dr. West, Ashland.*

The Partners in Recovery Drop-In Center (PIRC) was well-received and hosted AA, NA and other recovery group meetings as well as some fun parties and gatherings around holidays and other occasions. All the activities and operations were run by a group of volunteers with a solid core of those being staff from MMC’s health care system. The center was becoming widely popular and trusted in the region when the COVID emergency hit and the facility had to close its doors.

The PIRC opened back up in the spring of 2022 and is once again becoming a hub for MMC’s recovery community. A growing need for addiction and mental health services in the area emerged from MMC’s Community Health Needs Assessment survey completed last winter. MMC is engaged in addressing this need. One of the ways they help is by providing continued funding and donations to the PIRC. The Voices for Recovery, Chequamegon Bay Chapter, plays a big part in organizing and appropriating funds from MMC to the center and is led by one of MMC’s behavioral health services addiction therapists, Jerry Seitz.

“We are so grateful to the hospital for contributing to this very much needed service in our community,” said Jerry. “Especially in the winter months, people want to come and hang out and have a cup of coffee or just sit and be able to relax in a safe place. The PIRC is like a retreat for some people.”

The building was built in the late 40s and is need of constant repairs and upkeep. Looking to the future, MMC is committed to helping with renovations and expansions in order to keep this resource open and available to our recovery community.

“It’s about making people happy and proud to be in recovery and giving them a space to be able to gather with friends and meet new people in a sober environment, said Jerry. It’s about feeling safe and encouraging healthy lifestyles for all of the people of our region.”

### Memorial Medical Center, Ashland

## Focused on Recovery in Rural Wisconsin

Marshfield Clinic Health System asked a diverse group of Rusk County agencies what the focus should be for addressing substance use in the area. The overwhelming answer was “Recovery.”

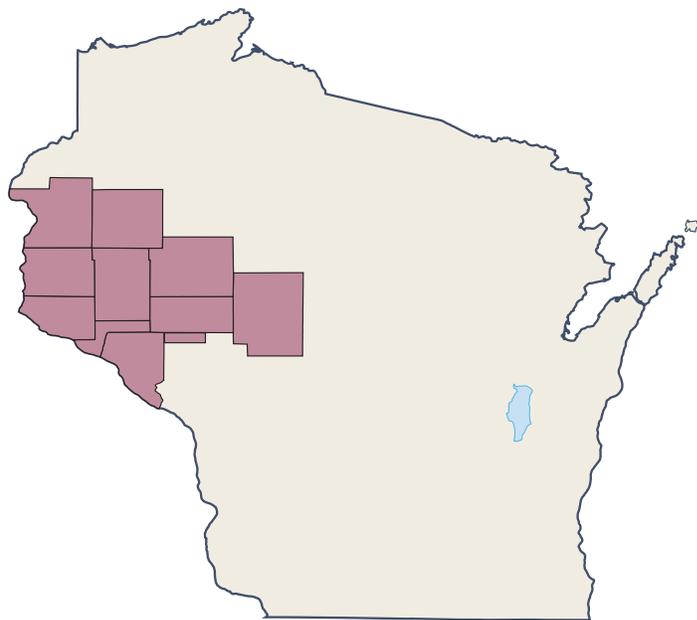


Substance misuse was identified as a primary community health issue in the 2019 Rusk County Community Health Needs Assessment survey. Nearly 80% of survey respondents classified substance use as a “major problem” and 40 percent claimed, “people are not aware of the resources to stop or prevent substance use.”

Marshfield Medical Center-Ladysmith took a two-prong approach to create movement around recovery efforts in the county by helping to spearhead the formation of a task force and implementing Recovery Coaching services.

### Marshfield Medical Center – Ladysmith

## West Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$77,148,692**

### Charity Care/Free Clinics

#### Free Dental Services

Benjamin McKinley, DDS, and the staff at Webster Dental clinic, partnered with the American Dental Association (ADA) to provide a Give Kids a Smile event that offered FREE dental appointments and services to uninsured youth in the community. Nine children were given free exams and had their teeth cleaned and sealants used. Fillings followed some of the exams, along with an extraction.

In addition to the Give Kids a Smile event, Dr. McKinley and staff made 22 athletic mouth guards for the Webster Football Team at no charge in their school colors of orange and black (\$250 per mouth guard) in an effort to protect the kids from injury.



*Dr. McKinley has Webster Tigers school spirit*

### St. Croix Health, St. Croix Falls

## Athletic Trainers Serve Local Students

For the past seven years, Marshfield Clinic Health System athletic trainer Michael Doersch has provided needed services to approximately 300 athletes in variety of sports in Neillsville High School, and to Greenwood High School since 2021.

Athletic trainers are educated and highly trained allied health care providers specializing in prevention, evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation of athletic injuries. An athletic trainer plays an integral role on the health care team caring for all injuries and ensuring a safe return to play. They care for the more normal, routine injuries on a daily basis and are also trained to recognize more traumatic injuries that may need to be referred to the doctor. They create a strong bond between the schools and the health system. "I am just one of several athletic trainers within the Marshfield Clinic Health System that covers many local high schools," said Doersch.

The impact made is immeasurable as they cultivate great relationships with the student-athletes, coaches, parents, and administration at these schools. A truly holistic approach is taken by athletic trainers upon injury to care for not only the physical injury, but the psychological issues as well so the athlete is truly ready in all aspects to safely return to sport. Great trust is built in athletic trainers by not only the student-athletes, but the coaches and parents alike as you create an environment that allows for the best care possible. An athletic trainer can be a great support to local high schools and a catalyst for the community.

### Marshfield Medical Center–Neillsville

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Community Health Workers Help Increase Health Knowledge, Self-Sufficiency

After more than a year of planning, Marshfield Clinic Health System (MCHS) hired its first two community health workers to serve high-risk populations in two counties, including the Plain and Hispanic communities in and around Neillsville.

A community health worker (CHW) is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has a close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison among the Health System, social services, and the community to facilitate access to health information and services. The community health workers help individuals and the greater community increase health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, social support and advocacy.

With support from a Health Resources and Services Administration grant, the health system worked with the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, National Farm Medicine Center to establish the Western Wisconsin Rural Behavioral Health Network and begin building a CHW program roadmap to serve within MCHS clinical departments and at community-based organizations.

The first workers were hired to address COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among the Plain and Hispanic communities. They have collaborated with the public health departments on vaccine efforts, provided vaccine education at community events and took part in setting up a new vaccination clinic. One CHW attended a candlelight vigil for community members who lost their lives to COVID-19 and remarked, "The community members that were there were happy to see someone that was working on the hesitancy."

Center for Community Health Advancement (CCHA) is committed to advancing CHW opportunities, including taking an active role in standardizing the certification process and participating in discussions around Medicare/Medicaid reimbursement for long-term sustainability.

### Marshfield Medical Center–Neillsville

## Respiratory Clinic Success

When COVID testing began, St. Croix Health (SCH) responded with drive-through testing at its St. Croix Falls location. The first version of the drive-through was held outdoors to help prevent exposure to staff and other patients. As weather became a challenge, the drive-through added the capability for patients to be tested and screened indoors in a sectioned off area of the hospital. The demand to address a more long-term response to this type of testing became obvious. To respond to this need, SCH planned, built, and opened the Respiratory Illness Clinic on the St. Croix Falls campus to replace the drive-through. The Respiratory Illness Clinic offers patients a safe place to be seen for symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, congestion, muscle/body aches, runny nose, loss of smell, and fatigue; symptoms associated with COVID, but also other highly contagious viruses.

The Respiratory Clinic opened its doors in November 2020, offering a separate entrance for patients experiencing virus and flu-like symptoms to limit exposure. It has a separate air handling system independent of the rest of the St. Croix Falls Clinic to restrict any airborne illnesses from being transported throughout the building. Success in this effort has been outstanding, and we are inquiring about expansion.



Pulse oximeters were given to patients to take home after COVID diagnosis so that they could better monitor their O2 stats. St. Croix Health also purchased iPads and implemented their use for patients to communicate with their families during COVID precautions.

St. Croix Health remains committed to helping protect staff, patients, and the community from the spread of COVID-19. The spread of COVID in our community was high for a significant portion of our calendar year. We continued to educate the people in our area about the best tools for reducing the spread of COVID.

From July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022

- The laboratory reported out 1,270,465 lab results in addition to the COVID tests.
- 10,248 COVID Specimens were processed at St. Croix Health Lab
- 4,580 COVID specimens processed by St. Croix Health staff and sent to external labs
- 6,353 COVID Antigen Tests done at SCRMC Lab
- 682 Monoclonal Antibody Treatments
- 43 COVID Oral Therapies
- 6,886 Vaccines

[St. Croix Health, St. Croix Falls](#)

## *Health Equity*

### **Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville Partners on Back-to-School Immunization Clinic**

Over the past two years, many individuals in the Neillsville region have fallen behind on recommended immunizations. To combat this, Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville in partnership with Neillsville School District, Sniteman Pharmacy and Clark County Health Department were able to offer vaccines at no cost to infants, toddlers and school-aged children at the open house. Select vaccines were also available for adults and school personnel.

[Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville](#)

### **Empowered Relief**

One in every five adults deals with some form of chronic pain, and pain is the number one reason patients access the health care system. The opioid crisis has taught us that pharmacological treatment of chronic pain is not the answer.

In October of 2021, St. Croix Health began offering Empowered Relief™ classes, a new service for addressing chronic pain. Developed at Stanford University, this evidence-based treatment is a single, two-hour pain management skills class which has been found to offer as much benefit as eight sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for patients

experiencing chronic low-back pain (CLBP) in a NIH study. The class is taught by Dr. Colleen Erb, a clinical psychologist at St. Croix Health (SCH) and a Certified Instructor for Empowered Relief™. Dr. Erb learned about Empowered Relief™ when she attended the American Academy of Pain Medicine Conference and SCH proceeded to support her in obtaining certification by Stanford in an effort to give our patients a non-pharmacological treatment option.

To reach as many individuals as possible, we offer this class monthly to the public at NO cost. The class is offered virtually so the patient just needs a phone, computer, or other device to attend. Family members are welcome to join as well. Registration is required so that class materials may be sent.

Since our first Empowered Relief™ class was offered in October of 2021, we have had 66 individuals attend the class, an average of six to seven attendees per class. In addition to the attendees from our St. Croix Health service area, we have had individuals sign up from as far away as Maine, New York, California, and Texas. Participants can learn more or register to attend a class on the SCH website ([saintcroixhealth.org](http://saintcroixhealth.org)) or through our link on the Empowered Relief™ site at Stanford University.

*“... medicine and this class go hand in hand. Today, I am thankful, and I will spread the word in our pain community.”* – an Empowered Relief™ attendee

[St. Croix Health, St. Croix Falls](#)

## Behavioral Health Services

Western Wisconsin Health (WWH) Foundation was recently awarded a Behavioral Health Telehealth Grant funded by the Department of Human Services through the American Rescue Plan Act in the amount of \$99,500. This one-time grant will provide Behavioral Health Telehealth access points in non-traditional health care settings in Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix County.

WWH Behavioral Health providers will connect with clients through a virtual device at a location closer to home. Clients can call WWH and schedule a behavioral health telehealth appointment at designated access points. Clients in the Ellsworth community can drive or walk to the local library where a private room and technology resources are reserved for appointments. This will connect clients who may have internet or transportation challenges to receiving services. This opportunity will open possibilities in the future for other sites in other communities.

Chief of the Behavioral Health Department at WWH Emily Veenendaal shared, “We are grateful to the Department of

Human Services for their dedication to serving the mental health needs of Wisconsin residents. We know that one of the main barriers to getting the care people need is access, and this grant helps us to break down those barriers. Mental health care is more crucial than ever, and with this grant, we can reach patients we may not have in the past.”

Western Wisconsin Health currently has 11 mental health providers.

[Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin](#)

## Hospital-Supported Initiatives

### Clark County Schools Benefit from Hydroponic Farms

What started as a lofty dream for Clark County’s Eat Right Be Fit (ERBF) Coalition became a reality in late 2021 when four of Clark County’s eight public school districts were awarded a hydroponic vertical farm along with one year of growing supplies.

Over the last few years, Wisconsin has seen a significant increase in the number of school districts who utilize



hydroponic farms to provide students with educational opportunities as well as to supplement their school lunch programs.

“In a single year, some farms are capable of producing 300lbs of fresh vegetables for less than one dollar per pound,” says Deenah King-Walia, ASW, Community Health Improvement Lead at Aspirus Stanley Hospital.

Hydroponic farms are unique in that they do not require soil.

Instead, the plants are suspended, with their root systems feeding directly from a solution of water and nutrients that circulates through tubes. There are several styles and sizes of hydroponic farms available on the market.

“They are relatively clean, provide many opportunities for agricultural education, and can grow large quantities of produce in very little space,” adds King.

ERBF received a \$10,000 grant from Aspirus Stanley Hospital which provided the launchpad to contact teachers at each of Clark County’s eight public school districts regarding the opportunity to receive a free hydroponic farm along with one year of supplies. Other partners joined the effort to help expand the program.

Teachers who were interested were asked to complete an online survey, discuss the opportunity with their principal or district administrator, and attend an informational meeting with Fork Farms, creator of the Flex Farm hydroponic system.

In total, four schools completed all preliminary requirements for consideration and submitted an application. They were Abbotsford School District, Loyal Elementary School, Owen-Withee Middle/High School, and Thorp Elementary School.

[Aspirus Stanley Hospital, Stanley](#)

## Health Screenings for Older Adults

Older adults are disproportionately affected by chronic disease, with conditions like heart disease, stroke, and diabetes among the leading causes of death for this age group. These conditions threaten independence by limiting the ability to perform basic tasks, contribute a significant cost burden and affect overall quality of life. Meanwhile, studies indicate Americans—including older Americans—delayed medical care during the pandemic and reported negative impacts to their health as a result.

When asked to provide health screenings at UW-Eau Claire’s Academy for Lifelong Learners for those “55 and better,” HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital and Prevea Health leapt at the opportunity to offer blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol checks, along with a stroke risk assessment. Approximately 50 attendees opted for the health screening, which included a results consultation and education on chronic disease prevention and management. HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital Stroke Coordinator Annie Letkiewicz worked with staff for months to plan and implement these efforts.

“The screenings provided the opportunity to identify potential health concerns as well as ways to learn how to manage and prevent chronic diseases,” Letkiewicz said. “It

was truly a pleasure to be able to provide this service to our community.”

Chronic disease prevention and management ranked among the top priorities in the 2021



*Table set up at Academy for Lifelong Learners*

Community Health Needs Assessments for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.

The annual Academy returned in 2022 after taking a pandemic pause. HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital has been recognized by the American Heart

Association and American Stroke Association for meeting the latest research-based standards for resuscitation care with the Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke GOLD Plus Quality Achievement Award.

[HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital, Eau Claire](#)

## Assessing Community Needs to Improve Health

The Marshfield Medical Center–Rice Lake Community Benefit Work Group completed a community health prioritization process in 2021 that is being used to set the course of community health improvement in Barron County for the next several years.

The work group was chaired by Marshfield Medical Center–Rice Lake’s President and included local Marshfield Clinic Health System leaders committed to improving health in Barron County communities. The work group conducted a community survey, held key informant interviews with local stakeholders, and reviewed secondary quantitative data to develop a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) report. The CHNA was used to develop a community Implementation Strategy plan for the hospital to address the identified health priorities.

The community survey asked Barron County residents to evaluate 14 health needs based on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services State Health Plan, Healthiest Wisconsin 2020: Everyone Living Better, Longer. The key informant interviews collected in-depth, qualitative information from Barron County residents.

The community survey collected 250 responses between March and April 2021. Survey results and insights from the key informant interviews as well as secondary data helped identify the top community health priorities as alcohol and substance abuse, behavioral health, chronic disease, and social determinants of health.

In 2022, the Marshfield Medical Center-Rice Lake CHNA was utilized in the development of the Barron County Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan. This process is led by Barron County Health Department and includes numerous partner such as the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Mayo Clinic Health System, Cumberland Health Care, Amery Hospital and Clinic, Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Barron, Rusk, and Washburn counties, and others.

### Marshfield Medical Center, Rice Lake

## Helping Youth Facing Food Insecurity

Through a Hometown Health Grant, Mayo Clinic Health System in Bloomer awarded \$15,000 to the Bloomer/New Auburn Food Pantry to expand the weekend meal program to middle and high school youth. The funds also helped establish a food pantry within Bloomer middle and high schools, so youth have easier access to food and meals.



*The food pantry at New Auburn school.*

The food pantry currently offers a weekend food program to the school districts of Bloomer and New Auburn and has about 70 students—mainly elementary aged—who are signed up and receive food weekly. This new initiative will reach middle and high school students who do not sign up for weekend meals but may not have adequate and easy access to healthy food. The new school locations will look like a mini store or pantry, the Bloomer food pantry will provide the food and the mini store will be run by school personnel.

“School personnel have been amazed by the amount of food available for their students. Many teachers were buying food using their own money, as the need was that great,” reported Bloomer Food Pantry Director Jessica Hanson. “We have already been able to purchase equipment such as mini fridges and coolers for the school pantries and also can openers for students to take home, as many of our students have stated that not having one was an obstacle to sending home canned food.”

“We recognize the direct impact food insecurity has on an individual's overall health and well-being,” says Brook Berg, director of community engagement at Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin. “Studies have shown that children with insufficient diets and lack of consistent access to food are more likely to have problems with health, academic learning, and behavioral issues. Providing support to youth who face food insecurity is core to our mission of investing in our communities and development of rural health populations.”

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Chippewa Valley in Bloomer

## Supporting Mental Health and Substance Abuse through Telehealth Counseling

Mayo Clinic Health System awarded a \$25,000 Hometown Health Grant to Buffalo County Health and Human Services Department and the Buffalo County Jail to fund mental health and substance abuse telehealth counseling for incarcerated individuals.

According to their grant application, most inmates of the Buffalo County Jail report having mental health and/or substance abuse challenges. Community Justice Services, a restorative justice program serving Buffalo County, found 61% of inmates have a history of or current struggle with mental health, and a greater percentage have a history and/or current struggle with substance abuse. Incarcerated individuals are not eligible for Medical Assistance and typically have limited financial means to access services.

Presently, inmates in the Buffalo County Jail have limited access to behavioral health and substance abuse services, limited to one day per week. Additionally, behavioral health providers are scarce in Buffalo County. Virtual access via telehealth improves client access to services by bringing providers to clients who are unable to travel and increases provider availability by eliminating provider travel.

Funding for this initiative is a collaborative effort. The UW Madison Division of Extension purchased two videoconferencing systems for the jail and Mayo Clinic Health System funds will be used to contract with substance abuse

and mental health counseling providers to offer telehealth behavioral health and substance abuse-related services based on the need of the individual inmate.

Mayo Clinic Health System believes that all community members have the right to equal access to health and medical services, regardless of their circumstances.

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Oakridge in Osseo

## Creating Healthy Food Access Opportunities

Shopping at a farmer’s market is a fun way to stock up on nutritious, locally grown food. Thanks to a collaboration between UW Madison Division of Extension’s Barron County Food Wise Program, Barron County Department of Health and Human Services, and Country Lane Farmer’s Market and Pantry in Barron—and supported by donations from Mayo Clinic Health System (MCHS) and Cupboard and Closet Thrift Store—more residents have access to seasonal fruits and vegetables. MCHS in Barron provided a \$5,000 donation to help with this project.



*Pictured from left to right: Kathy Splett, UW- Extension-Barron County Foodwise Program; Nichole Thompspon, Barron County DHHS; Karolyn Bartlett, Mayo Clinic Health System; Lynne Hanse, Cupboard and Closet; James Patton, Cupboard and Closet; Rhonda Seifert, Barron County DHHS*

The donation was used to purchase a card reader, and now people can use Quest/EBT benefits, debit cards or credit cards to purchase tokens that can buy produce at the Country Lane Farmer’s Market in Barron. The tokens act as cash and can be used at any market booth that participates in the program. In the first four months of the program, 61 Food Share-eligible families have used their cards at the local market.

“We are excited that this program is finally available in our community,” said Nichole Thompson, WIC director at Barron

County Department of Health and Human Services. “We are so thankful for the support from Mayo Clinic Health System and Cupboard and Closet for helping us get this plan into action. Finding ways to increase access to healthy foods has been a goal of the group, and this is one step in the right direction. We plan to find more ways to help bring nutritious foods to everyone’s table.”

MCHS's support helps provide low-income individuals equal access to healthy food opportunities, provides educational opportunities at the market on the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, and reduces food insecurity in Barron County.

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Northland in Barron

## Yoga at the Library Promotes Mental Health and Physical Wellbeing

As we entered year two of the pandemic, it was evident our communities were yearning for a sense of normalcy. The need for activities to promote mental health and wellness was greater than ever, so Mayo Clinic Health System and the Menomonie Public Library collaborated to offer Dunn County residents free yoga classes every Monday morning.

Tina Tharp, community engagement specialist with Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin teaches the classes. When they began in February 2022, classes were only offered virtually. As the weather warmed, classes moved outside, and participants were able to enjoy fresh air and the stunning scenery of yoga by the lake. Among the many benefits, yoga can help foster mental calmness, reduce stress, increase muscle tone, and support joint health.



*Participants enjoying yoga on a beautiful day in Menomonie*

“The Menomonie Public Library works to support community health and wellness by also offering a Story Walk in a city park, publicizing area events, and helping people navigate consumer health resources online and in our collections,” says Jolene Sterk, director at the Menomonie Public Library.

“Yoga on the library lawn has been particularly popular, with an average of 15-20 participants attending each week. We are happy to partner with Mayo Clinic Health System to improve quality of life for people who work, play and live in Dunn County.”

Both organizations also participate in Dunn County’s health coalition, “Health Dunn Right” and the Chronic Disease Prevention Action Team. Mayo Clinic Health System has hosted Music and Movement classes at the library in the past and is grateful to continue working together.

### Mayo Clinic Health System – Red Cedar in Menomonie

## Neonatal Care in a Rural Setting or Neonatal Care Close to Home?

Through a new virtual care partnership, physicians at St. Croix Health now have enhanced 24/7 access to Children’s neonatal care specialists. Using audio/video technology, St. Croix Health physicians can hold a virtual consultation with a neonatal clinician from Children’s Minnesota. From there, clinicians from both systems collaborate on the care management of newborns requiring acute stabilization after birth and determine whether the baby needs to be transferred another facility for further care.

When deemed appropriate, the St. Croix Health physician places a call to Children’s Minnesota and requests a virtual consultation. Within minutes, a neonatal specialist from Children’s will connect via an audio/ video conference with the provider and care team.

For St. Croix Health physicians, the virtual care partnership is a way to better serve area families. “This virtual care relationship between Children’s and St. Croix Health provides an enhanced level of safety for newborn care at the hospital. By allowing the Children’s neonatal specialists to see the baby, we’re confident that we’ll be able to keep and serve more families here, in their own community,” said Vice President of Patient Care Andrea Olson, MANU, MAOL, RN. “We take excellent care of these babies and will send them to another facility for even more specialized care if necessary.”

Partnerships like these also support Children’s vision to be every family’s essential partner in raising healthier children. “Our vision pertains to all infants – not just the ones who are born in our Mother Baby Centers,” said Dr. Mark Bergeron Virtual Care physician lead for Children’s Minnesota neonatology department. “For newborns that live farther away and who need additional services, the virtual health partnership lets us export our expertise and care to places we couldn’t otherwise reach. Virtual care is an excellent way

to help improve access to specialized care throughout the region.”

Children’s Minnesota seeks partners who are enthusiastic about improving patient care and who have a strong belief that a virtual partnership will benefit their community. It found both qualities in St. Croix Health. The virtual care partnership is sure to be an outstanding and helpful resource for area patients, one that improves the overall experience of families. We are committed to ensuring the success of this service to newborn patients.

“Whether a newborn needs to be transferred to a higher level NICU or we are able to continue care at St. Croix Health, we are focused on ensuring best practices are in place to provide the safest care possible,” said Dr. Michael Tiffany, Medical Director of OB/GYN. “Our ability to continue care close to home is valued by our patients and this program will help us continue to offer that experience for our patients and families.”

St. Croix Health, St. Croix

## Change to Chill School Partnership

Change to Chill (CTC) supports teen mental health by partnering with schools and offering free online stress reduction tips, life balance techniques, and health education services. To support a culture of wellbeing in local schools, the program has included the Change to Chill School Partnership (CTCSP) since 2018. In 2022, River Falls Area Hospital partnered with seven schools in four districts to bring the Change to Chill Components of CTCSP include staff training on Change to Chill, a paid student internship and funding for a “Chill Zone”—a designated space in the school for students and staff to practice self-care. Evaluations of CTCSP have shown increases in confidence in ability to cope with stress among students who participate in program components.



CTCSP Interns Support Peers in Schools

“CTCSP allows us to work directly with school staff, counselors, and students to equip them with more tools to de-escalate, identify, and process stress and anxiety more effectively,” said Allina Health’s East Regional Community Benefit & Engagement Manager Brandi Poellinger. “CTCSP student interns help develop the content to ensure CTC activities and messaging addresses their unique needs.”

**River Falls Area Hospital, Part of Allina Health, River Falls**

## *Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce*

### **The Many Benefits of Project SEARCH**

You might meet one of the Project SEARCH interns while at the Luther Campus in Eau Claire. You will recognize them by their bright blue polo shirts and big smiles.

Mayo Clinic Health System proudly supports Project SEARCH, a nine-month training and educational program that leads to integrated and competitive employment for youth with disabilities. Project SEARCH is based on a collaboration that includes a local business, school district, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, disability services agencies and family.



*Project SEARCH interns*

Since September 2016, Mayo Clinic Health System has hosted Project SEARCH interns, with more than 65 interns successfully completing the program. Eleven Project SEARCH graduates are currently working with Mayo Clinic Health System and five with Morrison Healthcare, the food service provider. Project SEARCH graduates are also working at businesses in Bloomer, Chippewa Falls, Colfax, Eau Claire, Menomonie and New Auburn. All partners are vital to the success of the program.

While onsite, students spend time in a classroom and are introduced to many departments in the organization. Interns rotate through three internships, each lasting 10 weeks. Students are matched with positions and departments that

align with their skills and interests, providing them with real-life work experience and many employment skills.

Not only do the students receive hands-on training and experience, but the organization and staff mentors benefit as well.

“Welcoming Project SEARCH interns into our inpatient pharmacy team has been a true blessing and something that I find to be mutually beneficial. Our team members gain an additional helper and exposure to those that are differently abled, which helps them to keep an open mind; be inclusive, understanding and compassionate; and think outside of the box,” says Colleen Hudson, inpatient pharmacy department technician supervisor for Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire. “I truly love working with Project SEARCH—it makes my heart happy!”

**Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire**

### **Nurse Extender Program**

In November of 2021, while enduring the pandemic and staffing shortages, St. Croix Health began its first nurse extender program. This position was created in the hope to obtain nursing students during their last semester of nursing school and give them direct on-the-job training/experience as they continued their schooling to become a registered nurse. Nursing students nearing graduation were paired with St. Croix Health’s registered nurses (RNs) and certified nurse assistants (CNAs) to enhance their clinical experience as nursing students and to support the increased demands on inpatient departments.

It is clear the efficacy of the program has been outstanding. Patients have received quality care, while the nurse extenders have increased their knowledge base through a hands-on approach. The extenders embraced the opportunity to learn from the nurse leaders and gained knowledge and skills they will take with them as they start their nursing journey. The nurse extenders brought relief to departments by offering an extra hand, brightness and enthusiasm that was impressed by all.

Two out of the four nurse extenders have officially joined the Medical/Surgical, Intensive Care Unit team as RNs post-graduation. They recently passed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN® exam) and are officially RNs. The program will continue moving forward.

Nurse extenders are truly an asset to St. Croix Health’s care team, and they are excited to welcome the newest extenders to the team.

**St. Croix Health, St. Croix Falls**

## WWH is Investing in the Future of Health Care by Offering Educational Grants

Western Wisconsin Health (WWH) has been working on the DHS Allied Health Services Grant. The purpose of the grant is to provide education and training for allied health professionals. WWH will be able to do two things as a result of being awarded this grant:

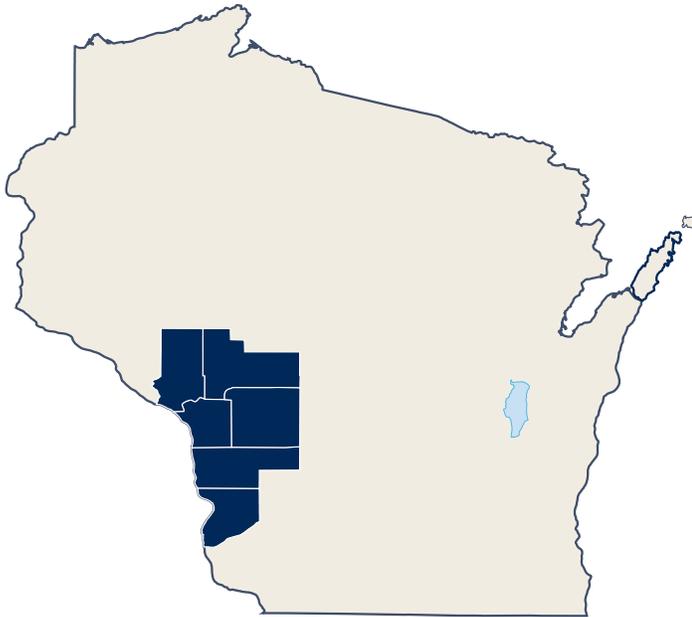
- 1. Create a Medical Assistant Apprenticeship Program**  
WWH will start with CNAs currently working in the clinic. Partnering with Penn Foster, an on-line school, for the education requirement of the apprenticeship program, and WWH will provide on-the-job training required of the program. Upon completion of the program, the apprentices will be promoted to Medical Assistants and take the exam to become certified.
- 2. Sponsor a Respiratory Therapist Student**  
Chippewa Valley Technical College is starting a new respiratory therapist program at their River Falls Campus, and WWH will pay the tuition for one student to complete the two-year program through this grant. The applications are currently being accepted. The selected student will have the opportunity to work as a part-time respiratory care assistant at WWH during their second year and will be hired upon graduation if a position is available.

### Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin



*Current WWH Employee Grant Recipients*

# Western Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$167,812,322**

## Charity Care/Free Clinics

### Gundersen Steps Up to Help People Experiencing Homelessness in La Crosse

In early 2022, around 120 people experiencing homelessness in the La Crosse region were staying at a local hotel. Gundersen Health System stepped up to help provide medical care to the population. Gundersen's Population Health and Family Medicine Residency programs worked with community partners to develop a mobile "street medicine" team. Together, they were able to treat a vulnerable population and protect them from COVID-19 through vaccines and testing. Their efforts resulted in fewer COVID patients in the ER, a reduction in admissions and readmissions, and lifesaving care to a group with challenges accessing basic health care.

Beyond the health of the patients, the street medicine program built trust between Gundersen and the unsheltered population. Prospective providers have also mentioned the program as a reason they would want to practice at Gundersen.

**Gundersen Health System, La Crosse**

### VMH Athletic Trainers Care for Local Student Athletes

An important link between our local school districts, their student athletes and our medical staff are the Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH) Athletic Trainers.

VMH's staff of three athletic trainers currently serve four schools: Kickapoo Area Schools, La Farge School District, Viroqua Area Schools and Westby Area School District. The sports VMH athletic trainers provide service to include football, volleyball, cross country, basketball, wrestling, baseball, softball, track, tennis and golf. The trainers' duties include:

- Evaluating and treating a wide range of injuries in the high school setting
- Triaging various orthopedic injuries, heat-related illness and concussions
- Making determinations of an athlete's ability to safely return to competition and practice after an injury
- Facilitating further care when needed in the emergency department, primary care, orthopedics, physical therapy or other medical specialties.
- Offering sports conditioning camps during the summer months to decrease injury risk and improve performance.



*VMH Athletic Trainer Matt Durrstein checks his supplies before a football game in Viroqua.*

"When serious injuries occur, our athletic trainers are onsite to triage injuries and lead the emergency action plans," said VMH Athletic Trainer Fean Wagner. "So far this year, I have been onsite for two compound fractures that required emergency responses. I personally view the athletic trainer as an additional layer of protection for the athlete in these situations."

**Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua**

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Gundersen Partners with National Guard, Hillview Healthcare Center to Free up Hospital Beds

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospital bed capacity has been top-of-mind for health leaders around the globe. It's no different for leaders at Gundersen Health System. Gundersen's Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nursing Officer Heather Schimmers, Post-Acute Care Clinical Operations Director Mandi Pericak, and Gundersen Geriatric Hospital Medicine physician Elizabeth Cogbill, MD, were part of a groundbreaking partnership in January 2022 between the Wisconsin National Guard and Hillview Healthcare Center.



Wisconsin National Guard members are thanked during a ceremony honoring their work as CNAs.

Through the partnership, National Guard members served as CNAs at Hillview, allowing Gundersen to move rehab-eligible patients out of the hospital and into nursing homes. Gundersen nurses also contributed to the effort by assisting in the care at Hillview. Before the partnership, only 50 patients were transferred to Hillview between August and December of 2021. In the first month and a half of the partnership, 38 patients were transferred.

Gundersen Health System, La Crosse

### Mayo Clinic Health System and Partners Hold COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics

Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse partnered with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater La Crosse, the La Crosse School District, and the La Crosse County Health Department to provide free vaccines for families. Mayo Clinic Health System provided staff, COVID vaccines for adults age 18+, and promotion for the vaccine clinics. The vaccine clinics were strategically held at two Boys & Girls Club locations in La Crosse's underserved neighborhoods to remove any

transportation barriers. Four clinics were held during the months of April and May. Appointments were made to ensure that participants received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at two additional clinics later in May. The clinics were supported through a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health aimed at increasing racial and geographic equity across the state's COVID-19 vaccination programs. In addition, Mayo Clinic Health System worked with the La Crosse County Health Department to offer childhood vaccinations at the clinics, as many had fallen behind on crucial vaccines during the pandemic.

Mayo Clinic Health System, La Crosse

## Health Equity

### Gundersen Addresses Health Equity Through Social Determinants of Health

Gundersen Health System has been strongly dedicated to addressing the Social Determinants of Health, firmly knowing a patient's health can be influenced by their access to health care, lifestyle choices and their access to other basic needs such as housing, food and employment.

Gundersen gives patients the option to fill out a Social Determinants of Health questionnaire. The patient may indicate they would like to be contacted if a need is revealed. The Gundersen Community Resource Connectors will then connect the patient with services such as CommunityLink and document the information in EPIC so the provider is aware. The initiative has also revealed concerns over toxic stress in a patient's life, which is one of the top health factors commonly reported in the questionnaire. Revealing this allows the patient and provider to discuss ways to approach toxic stress, including talk therapy or social services.

Gundersen Health System, La Crosse

### Tomah Health Develops Picture Menu for Afghan Guests

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. That is exactly what Tomah Health Nutrition Services Director and Registered Dietitian Michelle Lindsay thought when she developed a four-page illustrated picture menu to help Afghan guests who received care at Tomah Health. Hundreds of Afghan guests received care at Tomah Health as part of "Task Force McCoy" which oversaw temporary housing and support services for approximately 12,600 relocated Afghans at the nearby Fort McCoy military reservation.

Lindsay, along with assistance from the hospital's marketing department, came up with the illustrated menu to assist Afghans who ordered hospital-cafeteria food during their hospital stay.

"The room service menu helped to eliminate the potential for culturally inappropriate meals being served to this special population, to help nursing staff assist patients with meals in a culturally sensitive way and to increase oral intake to reduce hospital-acquired malnutrition," said Lindsay. She said the nutrition services staff also developed recipes and food items that extended a welcome to the guests.



*Tomah Health Nutrition Services Director Michelle Lindsay, MS, RDN, CD, reviewed a copy of the special illustrated menu offered to Afghan guests.*

"This was a labor of love that created some challenges, but the end result was truly a way for us to make them get a taste of home," Lindsay added. Some of the food items included walnut soup (letee) - a traditional post-partum soup, Afghan Kidney Bean Curry (Lubya), Qabili Palau - an aromatic rice dish- Afghan National Dish, naan, basmati rice, and some culturally appropriate snacks.

The nutrition service project was shared with Department of Homeland Security Chief Medical Officer Dr. Pritesh Gandhi, MD, MPH, during a roundtable discussion hosted by Tomah Health Sept. 23. Dr. Gandhi praised local health care staff for "bending over backwards" to provide care to the Afghan guests.

**Tomah Health, Tomah**

## *Hospital-Supported Initiatives*

### **Gundersen Creates Access to Preventive Screenings for La Crosse Hmong Women**

A recent community cancer needs assessment found many La Crosse-area Hmong women were behind on preventive screenings. To address the issue, Gundersen Health System hosted a first-of-its-kind event for Hmong women at the La Crosse Hmong Cultural and Community Agency location to hear presentations in the Hmong language regarding preventive health screenings for women over 50. They were also given the opportunity to use Gundersen's mobile mammography unit on-site to catch up on their screenings. COVID vaccines were also available.

This effort is part of Gundersen's commitment to population health activities to care for the community and improve health and well-being outside of traditional medical appointments.

**Gundersen Health System, La Crosse**

### **Mayo Clinic Health System Provides Funding to Local School for Mental Health Programs**

In 2021, Mayo Clinic Health System provided funds to both the Sparta Area School District and the Tomah Area School District as part of Mayo's "Season of Gratitude." Mayo asked that the funds be used to support one of the following Community Health Needs Assessment priorities—access to mental health, alcohol and drug use/misuse, COVID-19, and food insecurity. Both school districts used the funding for mental health programs for their students.

The Sparta Area School District (SASD) used the funds to provide additional resources for families who need mental health support but struggle to access it. The SASD has a fund that provides integrated mental health services to their students, allowing mental health providers to attend IEP, behavioral, or other district meetings as needed for students who receive mental health services. The Tomah Area School District used the funds to provide mental health counseling and therapy services to students in the school system who lacked adequate insurance coverage.

**Mayo Clinic Health System, Sparta**

## Tomah Health Teaches Children Stress Relief

While stress continues to be a common health concern for adults, it's important to know that children and teens can experience stress too. Tomah Health Emergency Services staff shared stress relief tips with youth during the annual Monroe County National Night Out event Aug. 2.



*Tomah Health Emergency Services staff, including registered nurse Lisa Reavis instructed children how to make stress relief rice-filled balloons during National Night Out.*

“Children can experience stress or anxiety for a variety of reasons and show it in different ways,” Tomah Health Emergency Services Director Suzanne Downing DNP, RN said. “Stress and anxiety can also lead to unhealthy habits; that’s why our staff focused on the subject,” she added.

Emergency Services staff, including registered nurse Lisa Reavis (photo) instructed children how to make stress relief rice-filled balloons during National Night Out.

Downing said staff also handed out tip sheets for parents on ways to have some fun while reducing stress.

“Each year we focus on a different health related subject and create a child-friendly activity to help children and parents live a healthier life,” Downing explained.

Tomah Health has participated in the annual safety and wellness event for the last 19 years.

**Tomah Health, Tomah**

## Growing and Developing Our Health Care Workforce

### Employee Engagement Initiative Spreads Kindness Around Like Confetti

The health care industry has encountered various challenges over the years, but perhaps the most recent barrier of attracting and retaining health care staff stands out the most. Black River Memorial Hospital (BRMH) is not only dedicated to maintaining a culture that appeals to the general workforce, but more importantly, appeals to our BRMH workforce.

Last fall, leadership at BRMH recognized a decline in employee morale and an increase in staff burnout, understandably so considering the ever-changing health care environment over the past couple of years. It was October of 2021 when BRMH rolled out a positivity and engagement initiative coined, “The Confetti Project.”

The tagline of the five-week project was “spread positivity around like it’s confetti,” which served as a call to action to staff. The multi-faceted project included energetic weekly communications with staff, kindness rocks interviews, “Pop” in Fridays, a “Confetti Inspiration Agency (C.I.A.),” dress-down days, and positivity portfolios.

Kindness rocks interviews served as a system to relay and acknowledge positive BRMH stories. “Pop” in Fridays allowed for staff to network and mingle, while also providing an opportunity for leadership to glean information from employees on tough topics.

The Confetti Inspiration Agency enhanced employee morale specifically by encouraging staff to engage with co-workers outside of their departments, in secrecy of course! Positivity portfolios were provided to all staff as a way to compile all the fulfilling recognition they received throughout the project.

From the beginning to the end, BRMH received an outpour of positive feedback from employees. By facilitating these recognition and engagement activities, staff were immediately uplifted and reminded of the incredibly meaningful work they do every day! This initiative ultimately allowed BRMH to assist in creating fulfilling, rewarding careers for our workforce, spreading positivity to all!

**Black River Memorial Hospital, Black River Falls**

## Gundersen Offers Training Programs, Free Tuition to Grow Workforce

Gundersen Health System isn't standing idle in the face of national recruitment and retention challenges. Gundersen provides paid training programs with guaranteed employment upon completion in several critical areas. People wishing to enter the health care field can enroll in either a CNA, medical assistant, or pharmacy technician training program at no cost to them. The programs have proven to be a success and are already helping to fill essential health care needs. Gundersen's efforts allow individuals to earn a living while completing their education. Jenni Osthoff is a current MA trainee and said the program has made it possible to achieve her goal.



*A third cohort of medical assistants began on Sept. 6.*

"With this program, I have realized anything is possible. I would have in no way been able to stop working to go back to school. I have children that needed to still be taken care of, but with this program, I am able to work and do something I love doing and go to school at the same time."

**Gundersen Health System, La Crosse**







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