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**WISCONSIN HOSPITALS CARE:**  
Serving Our Communities. Always.



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## WISCONSIN HOSPITALS CARE: SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES. ALWAYS.

### A Message from WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding



Wisconsin hospitals and health systems and the people who work in them are specialists in emergency preparedness. It's what they do. And the responsiveness, adaptability and expertise of our state's health care experts have never been tested more than in the past 20 months—the period of time largely reflected in this report on the community benefit investments and initiatives realized by Wisconsin hospitals and health systems in fiscal year 2020.

The challenges COVID-19 has caused throughout the state's entire health care system have only motivated hospitals and health systems across Wisconsin to reaffirm their commitments to the communities they serve in innumerable ways, as the Wisconsin Hospital Association 2021 Community Benefits Report attests.

Wisconsin hospitals and health systems understand that caring for their friends, neighbors and loved ones extends beyond the walls of their facilities. And that the scope of care they provide can and does shift with changing public health conditions, COVID-19 being an extreme example. In response to the pandemic, Wisconsin hospitals have gone well beyond their walls to take up basic government and public health tasks, like community virus testing and vaccine administration. They are also having to fill growing gaps in non-hospital care, such as becoming de-facto nursing homes for the hundreds of dischargeable patients nursing homes are not accepting. They do all this and much more, while continuing to respond to community emergencies, treat and heal serious disease, attend to accident victims and, of course, welcome new babies into the world. The recent arrival of 13,000 Afghans at Fort McCoy and the coordination of care between federal and contracted staff of Operation Allies Welcome and area hospitals is emblematic of the mission-driven resourcefulness Wisconsin hospitals exhibit every day.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin hospitals and health systems have remained active in their communities, providing education to patients and their caregivers on health-related topics, raising awareness of injury- and disease-prevention behaviors and helping to ensure the nutritional needs of disadvantaged children and families are met. In recognition of the many programs and initiatives Wisconsin hospitals have implemented to increase access to health care among disadvantaged populations, this year's report has added the category "Health Equity" to its hospital community benefits stories.

While such investments of time, energy and emotion are impossible to quantify, the financial contributions Wisconsin hospitals and health systems made in their communities in the form of charity care, subsidized health services, community health improvement services and other forms of meaningful giving totaled **nearly \$1.9 billion** in 2020.

This report documents just some of the ways hospitals and health systems contribute to the vitality of their communities beyond patient care. The stories it contains are also available online at [wha.org/community-benefits](https://wha.org/community-benefits), where visitors can pursue community benefits stories by hospital name or geography.

Thank you to our member hospitals and health systems for all of the ways they care for our communities, and to those who support their shared mission to protect the health of all those who call Wisconsin home.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Borgerding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "E".

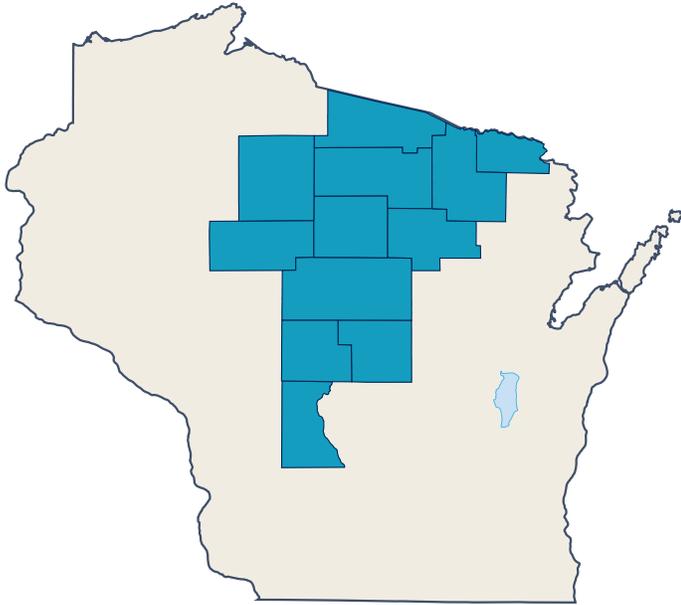
Eric Borgerding,  
WHA President/CEO

## Community Benefit Fiscal Year 2020 Financial Summary

Community Benefits	
Charity Care at Cost	\$169,031,339
Medicaid Shortfalls	\$1,095,659,148
Losses on Other Public Programs	\$27,804,251
Subsidized Health Services	\$170,793,173
Nursing Home Losses	\$7,776,921
Benefit Category	
Community Health Improvement Services	
<i>Community Health Education</i>	\$30,621,285
<i>Community-Based Clinical Services</i>	\$11,126,530
<i>Health Care Support Services</i>	\$33,939,776
<i>Social &amp; Environmental Improvement Activities</i>	\$4,641,525
Total Community Health Improvement Services	\$80,329,116
Cash or In-Kind Donations	\$37,473,426
Loss on Health Professions Education/Workforce	\$261,429,736
Loss on Research	\$13,109,400
Community Building Activities	\$6,180,506
Community Benefit Operations	\$8,251,438
Total Community Benefits*	
	<b>\$1,877,838,454</b>

*\* WHA follows CHA Community Benefit Guidelines, which excludes Medicare shortfalls and bad debt expense from the community benefit calculation. In fiscal year 2020, the statewide estimate for Medicare shortfalls was \$2,779,569,197 and bad debt at cost was \$262,889,511.*

# North Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$73,831,209**

## Charity Care

### Global Pandemic Didn't Stop Mile Bluff from Meeting Community Needs



When the pandemic hit, many things were put on pause; however, the need for health care was not. Mile Bluff Medical Center remained working for the community despite the unprecedented pandemic. These challenging times brought uncertainty and strife into many people's lives, and many lost their source of income.

By offering payment reductions and debt forgiveness, Mile Bluff's financial assistance program helped patients receive the care they needed, without furthering their financial burdens.

During the 2020 fiscal year, 459 individuals received financial assistance through the medical center's charity care program, forgiving over 317,000 in debt. In return, Mile Bluff's patient account specialists received many messages of gratitude from thankful patients for the assistance they were able to get during this hardship.

As a non-profit organization, Mile Bluff Medical Center is committed to improving the health and wellness of the community, which sometimes includes helping to relieve the stresses of financial burden. Patients are able to focus less on their ability to pay in full, and more on the importance of their health and wellbeing.

**Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston**

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Merrill Community Paramedic Program Adapts to Meet Needs of COVID-19 Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic grew to record-high cases in Merrill, local health care professionals came up with a plan to fight it by expanding a Community Paramedicine Program (CPP) that has been in place since 2018.

The CPP program from Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital and the Merrill Fire Department features paramedics conducting patient home visits focused on those who were discharged from Ascension Good Samaritan with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Congestive Heart Failure, or Pneumonia.

Patients who enrolled in the free CPP were contacted by the fire department, and an initial appointment was scheduled at their home within one week of leaving the hospital. The first two years of the program were very successful, with not one patient being readmitted to the hospital within a month.

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the country early in 2020, the CPP referrals dwindled until October, when things drastically changed. Around that time, Ascension Good Samaritan and other hospitals in the region and across the state were nearing capacity.

"Knowing that there were patients who typically would be admitted for observation for progression of COVID-19, we began discussing possible alternatives as cases continued to rise in the community," said Jonathon Matuszewski, chief administrative officer at Ascension Good Samaritan.

As a result of this discussion, it was determined that many of the patients who presented in the emergency department with COVID-19 symptoms required oxygen and additional monitoring but could remain in the comfort of their own home.

The Ascension Good Samaritan team decided to reach out to the Merrill Fire Department to see if the CPP program could be expanded to include these COVID-19 patients. To accomplish this, an ad hoc committee was formed to connect the necessary hospital departments and fire department personnel.

“The committee collaborated weekly and quickly developed protocols to address the need for lower acuity COVID-19 patients to remain safely at home with the help of the CPP program,” said Michael Clark, MD, emergency department physician and medical director of emergency medical services (EMS) at Ascension Good Samaritan. “This would in turn reduce admissions to the hospital and ensure available beds were being utilized by higher acuity patients who really needed hospitalization.”



*Merrill Fire Department Battalion Chief and EMT-Paramedic Phillip Skoug makes a patient home visit to provide COVID follow-up care as a part of the CPP.*

“Not surprisingly, Merrill firefighters embraced the additional responsibilities and became an integral part of the solution, addressing the unique situation caused by the pandemic,” said Merrill Fire Chief Josh Klug. “I am very proud that our staff answered the call for help and are fulfilling the first part of our mission by preventing harm in the community.”

“So far we have met our intended goal of reducing COVID-19-related hospital admissions and improving patient outcomes,” said Dr. Clark. “The CPP program represents the first steps in expanding the role of EMS professionals from primarily response and treatment to more complete medical support to the community, to help prevent medical emergency conditions from occurring.” Committee members are pleased with the results so far, knowing how important it has been to the Merrill community.

The CPP is funded through an annual grant of \$20,000 from Ascension Good Samaritan.

*On August 1, hospitals and clinics of Ascension Wisconsin in central and northern Wisconsin became part of Aspirus.*

### **Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital, Merrill**

## **DMAT Members at Aspirus Medford Hospital & Clinics**

In late October 2020, a Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) made up of 30 highly experienced health care professionals—including physicians and nurses—from across the United States arrived at Aspirus Medford Hospital & Clinics to assist in the hospital’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the fall, many skilled nursing facilities were unable to accept admissions due to COVID-19 outbreaks and strict state requirements. As a result, patients who no longer needed hospital-level care had nowhere else to go as they recovered from COVID-19 or other conditions, so they stayed in the hospital. This combined with the longer hospital stays many COVID-19 patients needed meant fewer available hospital beds.

To meet this challenge, Aspirus Medford welcomed DMAT support. Thanks to the presence of DMAT members, Aspirus Medford was able to open an extra hospital unit and provide additional supportive services to patients in their homes. The hospital typically staffs between 12-15 hospital beds, but with DMAT, it was able to increase its capacity to staff up to 35. This allowed Aspirus Medford to continue caring for recovering patients while ensuring availability of hospital beds for critically ill patients. It also allowed the hospital to provide support to the rest of the Aspirus Health system. As other Aspirus hospitals filled with patients, some of these patients were transferred to Aspirus Medford to help.



*DMAT members work in a special unit opened at Aspirus Medford Hospital.*

Between late October and early December, five different Disaster Medical Assistance Teams took turns working side by side with Aspirus Medford professionals to care for hospitalized patients.

“[We] feel very fortunate to have been able to have [DMAT] assistance because it not only helped our community, but it helped our larger Aspirus system service area,” said Jessica Faude, Aspirus Medford Hospital inpatient director.

### **Aspirus Medford Hospital & Clinics, Medford**

## Expanding Vaccination Opportunities in Wausau

Increasing the COVID-19 vaccination rates requires addressing multiple barriers. One of those barriers is access. How can we create more opportunities to get the vaccine when and where it is convenient for individuals?

Aspirus Health in Wausau addressed this barrier in summer 2021 by bringing the vaccine to a very popular event – Concerts on the Square. Hundreds of people attend this weekly seasonal outdoor event. Aspirus worked with the event planners and with AMI (a contracted agency to provide COVID-19 vaccines in the region) to promote and offer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine. On-site staff also helped individuals schedule an appointment for the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

Many people such as Phil Wanta decided to get the vaccine because of the convenience. “I recently got a job where I needed to have the vaccine or wear a mask,” said Wanta. “So, I figured I’d take advantage of the opportunity to get it done here.”

Over the course of the summer – when the highly contagious Delta variant began to surge across the country -- 64 individuals took advantage of the concert opportunity to protect themselves from the harmful consequences of COVID-19.

### Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Wausau

## Educational Online Initiative Helps Parents, Caregivers

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Marshfield Clinic Health System wanted to provide fun for Wisconsin kids while they were out of school and at home because of the virus. It was an opportunity to help parents and caretakers who found themselves becoming teachers and entertainers.

A project was created to compile top-quality, interactive, educational activities to help engage children in fun learning activities and help families stay happy, healthy and busy. Collaborators included the Center for Community Health Advancement (CCHA) and Marshfield Clinic Health System, working with Marshfield Medical Center’s Children’s Hospital.

Each week’s offering included live presentations through CCHA’s Facebook page and provided daily hands-on activities. Subjects included art, science, physical education, social and emotional learning, math, reading and writing, music and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). A downloadable calendar provided a suggested daily schedule

of lessons for the week so parents and caretakers had quality, educational content at their fingertips.



*Carolann Holding, music therapist from Marshfield Children’s, performs ‘Shakin’ my Egg’ during her egg shaker craft and movement activity.*

Each day offered hands-on learning activities for five different subject areas uploaded to CCHA’s website. A weekly downloadable PDF calendar was also available showing that week’s subject schedule.

Additionally, live presentations were given three times weekly via CCHA’s Facebook page. Laura Zelenak, CCHA health educator, scheduled videos and helped presenters with setup and preparation.

“We’ve shared educational and entertaining information with thousands of community members, highlighting talented people we have in this health system,” Zelenak said.

To make it truly interactive, families were encouraged to post picture/video comments or tag CCHA on social media to feature kids and their activities. Especially fun was to see science projects and drawings kids made, their dance moves and sports skills, hearing about their favorite books and more.

### Marshfield Medical Center, Marshfield

## Providing COVID-19 Support to Dentists

Respiratory therapists at Marshfield Medical Center Park Falls used their 30-plus years of experience to help a local dentist office continue to serve rural communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April of 2020, Northwoods Dentistry, which serves rural Price County in northern Wisconsin, reached out to Marshfield Medical Center Park Falls for guidance on obtaining and properly using N-95 masks to continue providing emergency dental care during the initial phase of the pandemic.

“We’d never worn N-95’s before,” said Hannah Palecek, registered dental hygienist at Northwoods Dentistry. “We weren’t sure if they were fitting properly.”

Denise Korittnig, a registered respiratory therapist, provided information that helped Northwoods Dentistry decide what masks and fit testing materials to buy. Korittnig, along with Michael Tyrrell, RRT from the Respiratory Therapy department at Marshfield Medical Center Park Falls, visited the Northwoods Dentistry Park Falls and Phillips offices to complete fit testing and train staff on how to fit test others.

“My dentist is at Northwoods,” said Korittnig. “It was actually pretty fun to be the person in the driver’s seat for change. We answered a lot of questions that day in the clinic about various things. I give them a lot of credit—they were really looking out for the community.”

As a result, Northwoods Dentistry was able to fit test every clinical employee and provide N95 masks.

“They made the training very simple,” said Dr. Mike Murphy, owner of Northwoods Dentistry. “Michael did a great job and was able to teach me how to fit test the rest of our offices.”

**Marshfield Medical Center, Park Falls**

## Health Equity

### Northwoods Discharge Program Provides Needed Monitoring Tools

When managing chronic diseases, monitoring progress is a key component of the process.

In the Northwoods, Ascension Wisconsin hospitals have launched a chronic care program to ensure that patients with Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease have the means for monitoring their health at home.

“The program provides pulse oximeters and scales to those who are unable to afford the items,” said Cecilia Deede-Bloedorn, BSN, RN, manager of case management for Ascension St. Mary’s Hospital, Rhinelander; Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital, Tomahawk; Ascension Eagle River Hospital and Howard Young Medical Center, part of Ascension, in Woodruff. “By providing these tools for chronic disease management, participants are able to improve their quality of life and increase the opportunity for self-managed care, which can decrease episodes of disease exacerbation and the chance of needed hospitalization.”

Daily weight monitoring is an important part of managing CHF while ensuring proper oxygen levels is critical for COPD patients and therefore those two devices were made available upon discharge to those without the means to provide for themselves.

*On August 1, the hospitals and clinics of Ascension Wisconsin in central and northern Wisconsin became part of Aspirus.*

**Ascension Eagle River Hospital, Ascension St. Mary's Hospital, Eagle River; Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital, Tomahawk; Howard Young Medical Center, Woodruff**

### Drive-Thru Events Provide Free Meal and a Flu Shot to Rural Communities

Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital in Merrill and Ascension Our Lady of Victory Hospital in Stanley play a vital role as Critical Access Hospitals serving rural communities in Wisconsin.

Each year the facilities do their part to educate the community on the importance of getting an annual flu shot, which during the COVID-19 Pandemic was more important than ever.

Health care providers throughout the country developed unique delivery mechanisms and for the people of Merrill and Stanley, a drive-thru event provided convenience and access for those who might not normally have access to a flu shot.

Drive-thru events in each community provided nearly 250 free flu shots and a free meal to take home featuring beef tips and gravy, mashed potatoes, corn, roll and dessert. Approximately 725 meals were delivered during the event.

“Our associates are very dedicated to their community and this event represents our way of giving back during these times of hardship,” said Jonathon Matuszewski, chief administrative officer at Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, in any given year, more than half of Wisconsinites fail to get a flu vaccine.

“Getting a flu vaccination during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic is a critical proactive step people can take to protect themselves and the people around them,” added Matuszewski. “Anything we can do to reduce illnesses and hospitalization from the flu is critical to protect our community and health care workforce.”

*On August 1, hospitals and clinics of Ascension Wisconsin in central and northern Wisconsin became part of Aspirus.*

**Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital, Merrill, and Ascension Our Lady of Victory Hospital, Stanley**



Photo courtesy of Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital, Merrill, and Ascension Our Lady of Victory Hospital, Stanley

## Meal Program Targets Hmong Families of Portage County

The Sib Pab (pronounced she pah) Prepared Meal program at Farmshed aims to address unmet health-related needs and enhance the health of Hmong elders and Hmong families who have family members living with a disability, by providing them with healthy, locally sourced traditional Hmong meals.



Volunteers prepare meals in the Farmshed kitchen

“Hmong families are underserved by Portage County food insecurity services, leaving residents without culturally specific resources to help maintain a healthy diet,” said Margo Willard, community benefit and community health improvement lead at Ascension St. Michael’s Hospital in Stevens Point. Healthy diets are a key indicator to maintaining healthy weight and improved mental health.

The Sib Pab at Farmshed Prepared Meal program is a partnership between the Community Action Program (CAP) Services’ Hmong Uplift program and Central Rivers Farmshed. The program prepares and delivers meals to Hmong elders and disabled residents twice per week.

“CAP Services Hmong Uplift program identifies and refers participants to Farmshed. Meals are prepared in the Farmshed kitchen, with the help of volunteers and under the direction of our Hmong cook,” said Willard. “A bi-cultural volunteer coordinator ensures participants receive meals and evaluates the program goals and outcomes.”

Funding from Ascension St. Michael’s Hospital provided Farmshed with a base that made it easier to raise additional resources from the community, including the Sentry Foundation, Portage County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), and the Portage County COVID Relief Fund. Since beginning the program in July 2020, Farmshed has prepared and served 4,000 meals.

A survey conducted during the month of June 2021 had the following results:

- 83 percent of participants reported feeling healthier because of their involvement in this program.
- 83 percent of participants reported feeling happier because of their involvement in this program.
- 83 percent of participants reported stronger connections with community partners like ADRC, Farmshed and CAP Services because of their involvement in this program.

*On August 1, hospitals and clinics of Ascension Wisconsin in central and northern Wisconsin became part of Aspirus.*

### **Ascension St. Michael's Hospital, Stevens Point**

## **Hospital-Supported Initiatives**

### **EBT Funding Increases Access at Tomahawk Farmer's Market**

Over the past two decades, local farmers markets have been established in larger and smaller communities across the United States and in Wisconsin.

As small farms bring their livestock and crops to market, the higher cost of food which often occurs is seen as a barrier for struggling families, since the scale of the small farm often cannot compete with crops and livestock raised in an industrial farm setting.

As an acknowledgment of the need to make locally sourced and sustainable foods more affordable, Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital donated funds to the Tomahawk Farmer's Market.

The funds help support the expense of the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) machine fees.

"Having the EBT machine available at the Farmer's Market makes accessing fresh food easier for individuals with FoodShare," said Jane Bentz, community benefit and community health improvement lead. "In addition, the hospital's donation for the coupons effectively doubles the purchasing power of consumers with low income."

*On August 1, hospitals and clinics of Ascension Wisconsin in central and northern Wisconsin, including Ascension Sacred Heart became part of Aspirus.*

### **Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital, Tomahawk**

## **Health System Partners with Safe Kids Coalition**

Safe Kids Wood and Clark County expanded their service area in 2020 to prevent unintentional injuries in children, the leading cause of death for kids in the U.S.

Marshfield Medical Center-Marshfield is the lead agency for the local Safe Kids coalition, a member of the Safe Kids Wisconsin coalition, part of the Safe Kids Worldwide network. The coalition works to reduce unintentional injuries through a number of programs and initiatives that focus on bike safety, fire safety, pedestrian safety, water safety, ATV safety, distracted driving, farm safety and poison prevention.

This past year, Clark County was added to the service area and the coalition became Safe Kids Wood and Clark County. "There was no coalition in Clark County," said Liz Kracht, injury prevention coordinator for Marshfield Medical Center-Marshfield. "But we'd been working with the health department on injury prevention. With the acquisition and expansion of the Neillsville hospital, it made sense to add Clark County to the Safe Kids coalition."

This allowed for the expansion of several initiatives into Clark County including the Caught Being Safe program, which rewards safe behavior. Through a collaboration with local police, sheriff and fire departments and other community partners and sponsors, children, teens and families are rewarded when they are observed making safe decisions and displaying safe behaviors in the community. When police officers observe safe behavior, such as wearing a bike helmet, they are able to provide a reward such as a coupon for ice cream or another treat.

In the future, farm safety will be a priority of the coalition, especially among the Amish and Mennonite communities, who make up about one-third of Clark County's population.

### **Marshfield Medical Center, Marshfield**

## Hydroponic Gardens: Growing Access to Healthy, Fresh Produce Year-Round

The Center for Community Health Advancement (CCHA) is placing hydroponic garden units in locations across the Marshfield Clinic Health System service area to address the issue of food insecurity.



*Harvesting hydroponic lettuce at Marshfield Medical Center - Minocqua are (from left) Kathy Springhorn and Melanie Lloyd. The lettuce donation was accepted by Lakeland Food Pantry in Arbor Vitae.*

These indoor gardens, constructed by Wisconsin-based Fork Farms, LLC, grow plants in nutrient-rich water instead of soil.

They are strategically placed to provide individuals and communities struggling with food insecurity access to fresh produce year-round and support awareness that healthy food is necessary for good health.

In 2018, the Health System awarded a healthy communities grant to the Lincoln County Health Department for the units. Their success inspired CCHA to examine community health data, identify communities with the greatest need and place garden units in those communities to impact food insecurity, health and accessibility to fresh produce.

One identified area of great need is Rusk County, so units were placed with community partners in Ladysmith, Flambeau and Bruce. This project was expanded to Oneida and Vilas counties, including a unit installed at the Marshfield Medical Center-Minocqua, which had its first bountiful harvest in spring 2021. The lettuce was donated to the Lakeland Food Pantry.

CCHA will continue to plant the seed of innovative food solutions in other communities, all to improve the health of their residents through access to affordable nutrition.

[Marshfield Medical Center, Minocqua](#)

## Medical Advisor Program Provides Support to Local Schools

Imagine you are a health professional working in an environment where health is not the primary focus. You may or may not have access to your patient's medical information. You are isolated from the rest of your colleagues and wear a multitude of hats within your professional role. Where can you turn for professional advice and consultation?

School nurses in central Wisconsin are receiving this professional support through a partnership between Marshfield Clinic Health System (MCHS) and Marathon County Special Education (MCSE) to provide a physician medical advisor.

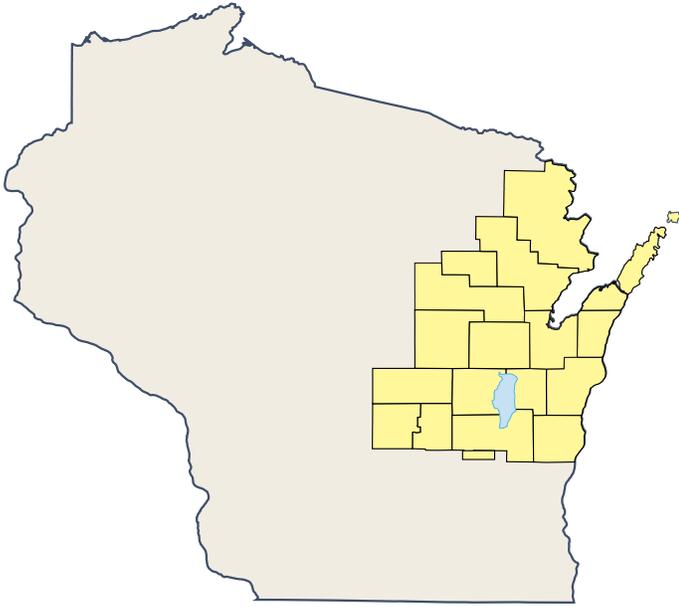
The School Medical Advisor Program was started as a pilot in 2018 and assigns a MCHS pediatrician to act as a School Medical Advisor (SMA). The SMA provides numerous services including assistance with policy and procedures for student care, training, support, advocacy for children's health, and collaboration with Public Health officials.

Marshfield Clinic Health System pediatrician, Jeffrey H. Lamont, MD, a long-time pediatrician and recognized state and national leader in school health issues, brought the idea to MCHS leadership several years ago. Dr. Lamont and MCSE, which provides school nurse services to six rural school districts in Marathon County, recognized an increasing need for school health services as the health needs of school-aged children grew in scope and complexity. At the same time, school health nursing capacity is lacking in many counties where school health nurses are often shared amongst schools and school districts.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the school health environment in 2020, progress was made toward program goals. Dr. Lamont has monthly meetings with school nurses and provides consultative services as needed. Standardized medication authorization forms and emergency action plans were developed, and staff development continued throughout the school year.

[Marshfield Medical Center, Weston](#)

# Packerland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$278,657,806**

## Charity Care

### A Little Help for a Single Parent

A.D. was adjusting to life as a newly divorced parent with a small child while also trying to manage a chronic illness.

When her symptoms started, she avoided going to the doctor because she didn't have access to health insurance. After her divorce, she tried applying for Medicaid, but her part-time job placed her over the income limits.

Eventually A.D.'s symptoms worsened and seeking medical care was unavoidable. A.D. went to the Emergency Department at Aurora Medical Center-Bay Area and was admitted for an inpatient stay. Already struggling to make ends meet, A.D. was terrified that she would get a large medical bill.

The hospital's financial advocate met with A.D. and completed a financial assessment.

"I've been putting off coming to the hospital for quite some time because I don't have insurance," A.D. said. "I knew my health wasn't good, but I also knew there was no way I could pay for any medical bills on my own."

Following the financial assessment, the advocate was able to approve A.D. for a 100% discount on her medical bills through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

The financial advocate delivered the good news to A.D. Through tears, A.D. replied, "This is such a blessing. I am so thankful that this is available for patients like me."

[Aurora Medical Center-Bay Area, Green Bay](#)

### N.E.W. Community Clinic in Green Bay

The N.E.W. Community Clinic's mission is to provide access to quality, comprehensive, and compassionate health care for low-income and uninsured people and families in the Green Bay area. The clinic, which now includes multiple clinic sites, celebrated its 50th anniversary in July 2021.

Dr. Yolo Diaz is a bilingual pediatrician employed by Advocate Aurora Health who cares for patients at N.E.W. Community Clinic. Dr. Diaz was born and raised in Mexico City and migrated to the United States with her husband after completing her medical training, making Green Bay, Wisconsin her permanent home. She has been caring for patients at N.E.W. Community Clinic since 2001 and is a trusted member of the Green Bay community, especially among Hispanic community members.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Diaz's relationship with Hispanic community members has been crucial to educating them about COVID-19, testing and vaccinations. N.E.W. Clinic started offering COVID-19 vaccinations to patients in January 2021 to bring the vaccine to underserved groups in the area. Dr. Diaz publicly urged the Hispanic community to get the vaccination and reach out to her directly at N.E.W. Community Clinic with questions.

During 2020, Dr. Diaz served 100 new patients and accommodated 581 total patient visits at N.E.W. Community Clinic.

[Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay](#)

### Assistance When Care Can't be Delayed

M.J. has been driving trucks for his entire career. Now in his mid-50s, he is still on the road full-time.

One evening while driving, M.J. noticed something wasn't quite right. He was starting to see halos around lights and his vision was getting cloudy. He noticed a while back that it was getting harder to see in the evenings, but he didn't want to visit the doctor because he recently lost his insurance.

M.J. realized he couldn't delay getting medical care any longer. If he couldn't see, there was no way he could keep working.

M.J. was evaluated by a provider at Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County. The provider determined that he needed



to have bilateral cataract surgery as soon as possible or he would lose his vision.

Aware that M.J. was uninsured, the physician connected him to the hospital's financial advocate. The advocate completed a financial assessment and was able to help M.J. gain approval for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

M.J. received his surgery at no cost to him. After healing, he was able to return to work.

[Aurora Medical Center - Manitowoc County](#)

### Help Before Insurance Starts

A recent high school graduate started his first job when he began experiencing severe stomach pains and headaches. He went to the Aurora Medical Center - Oshkosh Emergency Department for care.

The hospital's financial advocate visited the patient during his hospital stay. She noticed the patient did not have any insurance coverage listed in his medical records.

"My parents couldn't afford to keep me on their insurance any longer," he said. "I just started a new job and I'll be able to get insurance through my work soon."

Seeing this type of situation before, the financial advocate asked the patient if he was willing to complete a financial assessment. The patient agreed and they walked through the survey together.

The financial advocate was able to help the patient get approved for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

With tears in his eyes, the patient said, "Thank you so much. I don't know what I would have done without your help."

[Aurora Medical Center - Oshkosh](#)

### Financial Assistance for a Student

A young man from another state was attending a local college when he experienced a behavioral health emergency.

He arrived at the Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center under the impression that he had insurance through his school. Unfortunately, when the school reached out to the insurance company, they discovered that his paperwork had been misplaced and that he had no coverage.

The patient began to panic when he heard the news. The hospital team members caring for the patient asked the financial advocate to meet with him.

When the financial advocate met with the patient, they were able to complete a financial assessment. He was approved for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

The patient was thankful for the help from the hospital team caring for him and for the financial assistance.

### Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center

## Educational Achievement Partnership Program at Children's Wisconsin

A child's educational achievement is a key component of their overall health and well-being. Children with chronic illness may experience delayed milestones that impact school performance in areas of learning, language development, motor skills, attention and behavior, and social-emotional functioning. These differences often do not self-correct and require early intervention and school support. There are often few opportunities for collaboration among educational and medical practitioners leading to communication gaps and missed opportunities for necessary coordination of supports.

In 2015, Children's Wisconsin established the Educational Achievement Partnership Program (EAPP) to bridge the gap in care coordination between the hospital and schools. With experienced educators at the center of a multidisciplinary care team, the patient's educational needs are assessed, and the care team works to implement interventions with educational partners in the school settings. These individualized plans help ensure families, clinical providers and education staff can support and advocate for each child's unique needs.

To date, more than 700 patients served by the EAPP have reported new or improved education plans, school-based health and safety guidance, school attendance, mental and behavioral health and overall family well-being and quality of life. Patients served through EAPP average six fewer hospital utilizations per patient per year resulting in tremendous health care cost savings. The important care provided through the EAPP is not covered by insurance and is provided free of charge for families to help advocate alongside them and untangle the complex layers of health disparities and educational gaps.

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

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Collaborating on Underserved COVID-19 Vaccine Populations

Agnesian HealthCare, a member of SSM Health, is serving as a community partner with Fond du Lac Area United Way, which is one of 100 organizations across Wisconsin to receive funding for a five-month COVID-19 community health outreach program. The project's overarching goal is to support national and statewide health equity efforts to reach the maximum number of people with information about COVID-19 vaccines. The team, which includes Alexandria Berg, senior community health specialist, is addressing barriers that hinder access for marginalized and underserved persons who might have difficulties accessing care services.



Agnesian HealthCare was on hand during Fond du Lac's recent Juneteenth event to provide information about services available, including COVID-19 assistance, to participants.

"Efforts have focused on ways to increase vaccine access by coordinating rides, helping schedule appointments, hosting vaccination destinations, and making information more inclusive," Berg says. "Together we are all committed to protecting and promoting the health and safety of all our Fond du Lac citizens."

As of August 13, 43.2% of Fond du Lac County's adult population has completed their vaccine series, up from 36.2% in April. Currently, fully vaccinated rates by race and ethnicity stand at 16.6% of American Indian residents, 30.8% of Asian residents, 16.1% of Black residents, 41.0% of White residents, 31.4% of Hispanic residents, and 42.0% of non-Hispanic residents.

Community outreach between health care and non-profits will continue bringing pop-up clinics to the community to increase access to COVID-19 vaccines and information. Agnesian HealthCare providers offered public service announcements for cable and other social media channels with messaging specific to underserved populations.

### Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

## Bellin, Partners Vaccinate Community at Lambeau Field

When it came time to stage a mass vaccination site for COVID-19 in the Green Bay community, Bellin Health knew it was important to go big—really big.



*Bellin Health worked with Brown County Public Health and the Green Bay Packers to stage a community COVID-19 vaccination clinic at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. The clinic administered more than 46,500 doses from March 17-June 30.*

So Bellin partnered with the Green Bay Packers and Brown County Public Health to create a COVID-19 vaccination site at the home of the Packers, Lambeau Field. Mirroring the nationwide trend of staging vaccination sites in sports stadiums, the community site opened March 17 in the Lambeau Field Atrium. It changed locations to offer vaccines with a view of the field in May and wrapped up operations June 30 after administering a total of 46,593 vaccine doses over the course of 106 days.

“Our Lambeau Field vaccination site was a true community effort to get shots in arms, and we couldn’t have asked for better partners in that endeavor,” said Bellin Health President & CEO Chris Woleske. “The Lambeau site is well-known, centrally located, and certainly a draw for individuals from our community and beyond. What’s more, we made equitable access the centerpiece of our efforts at Lambeau, a focus that has continued now that vaccines are part of our day-to-day operations.”

The Lambeau site’s equity plan included:

- Engaging community partners including local libraries and resource centers, law enforcement, school districts, other health systems and organizations serving diverse populations
- Addressing equity issues in areas including registration, language, transportation and technological barriers

- Working to build vaccine confidence in traditionally underserved groups within our communities

Bellin has continued its equitable vaccination push with community outreach efforts including a mobile vaccination partnership in Brown County and a joint press conference with other health systems to directly address diverse communities, as well as seven-day-a-week walk-in access at Bellin FastCare clinics, shots at hospital discharge and easy appointment scheduling at all Bellin Primary Care clinics.

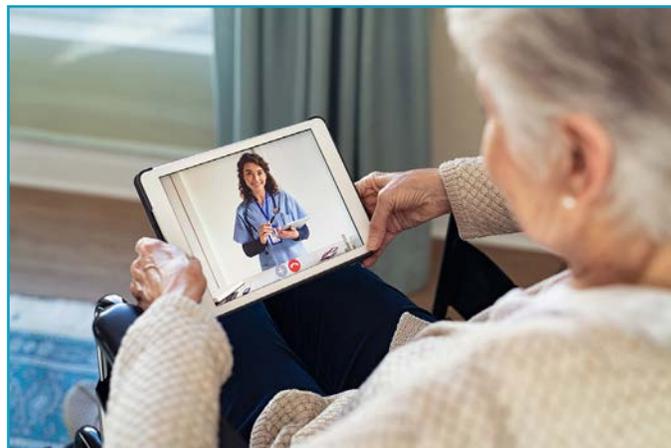
“We know that getting shots in arms is the only way to end this pandemic for good,” Woleske said. “Bellin remains committed to vaccinating the communities we serve and promoting equitable vaccination for all.”

**Bellin Health, Green Bay**

## Free Virtual COVID-19 Screening Available at Door County Medical Center

Door County Medical Center (DCMC) announces free virtual online COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) screening available via the DCMC Patient Portal for individuals who are concerned about whether they have contracted or been exposed to COVID-19.

In addition to the DCMC COVID-19 Hotline, patients can now log into or set up a profile on the DCMC Patient Portal ([mydoorcountyhealth.org](http://mydoorcountyhealth.org)) to schedule a virtual visit in the comfort of their own home with a nurse practitioner through a computer or mobile device.



These free virtual visits are for individuals with minor to moderate symptoms. Individuals can schedule their visit via the DCMC Patient Portal. First-time users can follow the prompts to set up their profile.

During the virtual visit, DCMC clinicians will evaluate symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath, discuss known risk factors, answer questions and recommend

next steps including referring people to the right location for an in-person visit if needed.

Community members can still call the DCMC COVID-19 Hotline for free to address their COVID-19 concerns. That number is (920) 746-3700. The Hotline is open seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

It is important to know your health care options and make informed choices. These options are designed for patients to connect with a medical professional if they feel they have COVID-19 symptoms. Virtual visits are intended to address COVID-19 health care concerns in a timely manner in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Get more information about virtual screening at [www.dcmedical.org/patient-portal](http://www.dcmedical.org/patient-portal).

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

## COVID-19 Changes Our World

Without a doubt, 2020 was a year unlike any other. The COVID-19 pandemic not only shook the world but also changed everything we knew. Holy Family Memorial (HFM) staff continues to pivot daily as we adapt to the developing needs of the pandemic.



*Judy Check, RN, Employee Health Nurse, gives a community member his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.*

While there were many COVID-19-related changes at HFM, the following are a few of the major transformations:

- Before COVID-19, HFM had seven negative pressure rooms. It quickly became apparent that was not enough. Our Plant Operations Department quickly converted an additional 17 hospital rooms, one surgical suite, and six exam rooms in the Respiratory Clinic to negative pressure rooms.
- The HFM COVID-19 Hotline, Respiratory Clinic, and mass testing and vaccination sites are a huge priority to offer these resources to community members.

HFM also assisted Manitowoc County Public Health with communitywide testing. From the beginning of the pandemic through December 2020, HFM ran more than 12,000 COVID-19 tests for the community.

- HFM rolled out telemedicine visits to provide patients access to virtually meet or talk to their health care provider.
- Just before Christmas 2020, COVID-19 vaccination began for health care workers and HFM began vaccinating its frontline employees. Since spring of 2021, HFM has administered over 10,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses in our community.

The cost of HFM's COVID-19 efforts was \$959,561 in community benefit expenditures. As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, we know we will continue to adapt. We are grateful for the enormous outpouring of support from our community to our frontline staff. And perhaps most of all—HFM reaffirmed that its support for the community and unwavering dedication to being there in good times and in bad—is of the utmost importance.

[Holy Family Memorial, Manitowoc](#)

## ThedaCare and Partners Open Federal COVID-19 Testing in Neenah, Continues Mobile Testing Efforts

In October 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 surge in Northeast and Central Wisconsin, in an effort to expand access to testing for those living in the area, the U.S. Surgeon General, ThedaCare, Sen. Roger Roth and community partners announced the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would stand up a surge testing location in Neenah, Wisconsin. At the time, Wisconsin was seeing significant increases in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations and would benefit from additional opportunities to identify new cases, especially for those who are asymptomatic.

“Testing is a critical component in our battle against COVID-19,” said Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams, who visited Neenah for the announcement. “If you or your loved ones are worried you may have come into contact with COVID-19, please make an appointment to get tested. It’s easy and free. I am also urging the public to please continue to do their part to protect others and to stop the spread of COVID-19 by following the three Ws: wear a mask, wash your hands, and watch your distance. We owe this to our community and our friends and family members to protect them.”

The site was located at ThedaCare Physicians-Neenah and provided testing at no cost to all individuals. Surge testing

provides additional temporary federal support to areas that have seen a recent spike in coronavirus cases. Leaders from ThedaCare have worked with government officials, public health departments and other community partners to ensure access to expanded testing for Northeast and Central Wisconsin.



*To expand access to testing for those living in the area, the U.S. Surgeon General, ThedaCare, Sen. Roger Roth and community partners announced HHS would stand up a surge testing location in Neenah, Wisconsin.*

“We have been in constant contact with the health systems here in Northeast Wisconsin, and understand their need for more supplies,” said Sen. Roger Roth (R-Appleton). “Together we have been working diligently with federal agencies to get the resources we need to Northeast Wisconsin. I want to thank HHS, FEMA, and ThedaCare for their tireless efforts to get this up and running.”

This site would conduct up to 30,000 tests with the intent to detect cases that would go undetected to further help Wisconsin flatten the curve. Testing helps our communities better understand the infection and spread, allowing the public to take individual and collective action to keep themselves and others safe.

“We know that to best manage community spread of COVID-19, testing and contact tracing are critical,” said Dr. Jennifer Frank, ThedaCare Chief Medical Officer. “Testing directly ties to our mission of improving the health of the communities we serve and gives us insight to the breadth and depth of those infected in our communities, and thus what the future numbers may be.”

The surge testing efforts were continued by ThedaCare far beyond the one site. Using mobile vaccination vehicles, ThedaCare conducted 15,341 mobile COVID-19 tests from October-December 2020 at more than 50 locations. As of August 2021, mobile testing continues by the ThedaCare team in Northeast and Central Wisconsin communities.

**ThedaCare, Neenah**

## Health Equity

### Agnesian Healthcare Supports New Homeless Shelter Program

After two years of planning, a new \$4 million homeless shelter project is underway for Fond du Lac County. St. Vincent de Paul and Solutions Center, the two primary agencies that serve those experiencing homelessness, came together to address unmet needs related to homelessness both equitably and effectively.

Agnesian HealthCare, a member of SSM Health, has pledged \$100,000 in community benefit funds over the next three years to support.

“Homelessness affects us all,” according to Dawn Vandenberg, regional director of Mission Integration. “It has a ripple effect throughout the community. It impacts the availability of health care resources, crime and safety, the workforce, and the use of tax dollars. Homelessness impacts the present as well as the future. It benefits all of us to stop the cycle of homelessness, one person and one family at a time.” Fond du Lac’s homeless shelter has capacity for five families at a time. The demand for services continues to trend upwards with an average of 150 people experiencing homelessness a month.

The new shelter—as part of the St. Katharine Drexel Shelter Program—is being constructed on property currently owned by St. Vincent de Paul and is being designed to accommodate up to 100 clients and provide a warm, safe place for families with children, and single men and women that are facing homelessness, while respecting privacy and needs of all clients through use of separate wings for each population. The project is estimated to be completed in fall of 2021.

**Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac**

### Center for Children with Special Health Care Needs at Children’s Wisconsin Helps Connect Families to Resources They Need

The Northeast Regional Center for Children & Youth with Special Health Care Needs (The Regional Center), based at Children’s Wisconsin Hospital-Fox Valley, provides information, resources, guidance and referrals to community service providers for families with children who have special health care needs, including those with long-term physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions.

While families may be referred to The Regional Center for one specific need, other needs are often uncovered for siblings or the family as a whole, including challenges with transportation, accessing healthy, affordable food and

paying their rent or mortgage. Families experiencing housing insecurity in the Fox Valley area face shortages in available homes and years-long waitlists for Section 8 housing, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. During 2020, The Regional Center enhanced their partnerships with both community organizations and local school district housing coordinators to support families in their search for safe and stable homes.

A mom with three children, including one who was being discharged from Children’s Wisconsin Hospital-Fox Valley, had postpartum depression and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, had been evicted and needed a safe place to stay with her children. The Regional Center connected her to a community partner that provided her the rapid COVID-19 test she needed so she and her family were able to access shelter as they planned their next steps. Ensuring families in need are connected to community resources is critical to helping promote child and family health and well-being.

### Children’s Wisconsin Hospital-Fox Valley, Neenah

## Por Mi Familia COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic

Holy Family Memorial, Crusaders of Justicia, Forward Latino, and the Manitowoc County Health Department hosted “POR MI FAMILIA” (FOR MY FAMILY), a COVID-19 vaccination event in Manitowoc.



HFM staff help set up for “Por Mi Familia” (For My Family), a COVID-19 vaccination event.

Hispanics currently comprise Wisconsin’s largest minority community and per the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Hispanics also trail their white Wisconsin counterparts when it comes to getting vaccinated.

While outreach efforts for this vaccination event were focused on the Hispanic community, individuals of all races and ethnicities ages 12 and older were invited to come and get their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. A second event was also scheduled to administer the second dose of vaccine.

In all, 20 people received their first dose; 16 had their second dose and four people who had prior commitments were referred to schedule with Holy Family Memorial or another retail pharmacy on their own time.

### Holy Family Memorial, Manitowoc

## ThedaCare Launches Social Determinants of Health Screening

To advance its Population Health Strategy, where ThedaCare predicts and prevents health needs and is a partner in the health and well-being of all community members, ThedaCare is using a new social determinants of health (SDOH) screening tool to identify social needs and connect patients who are struggling with resources. ThedaCare Physicians Internal Medicine-Neenah is the pilot location for the screenings which began on April 19, 2021.

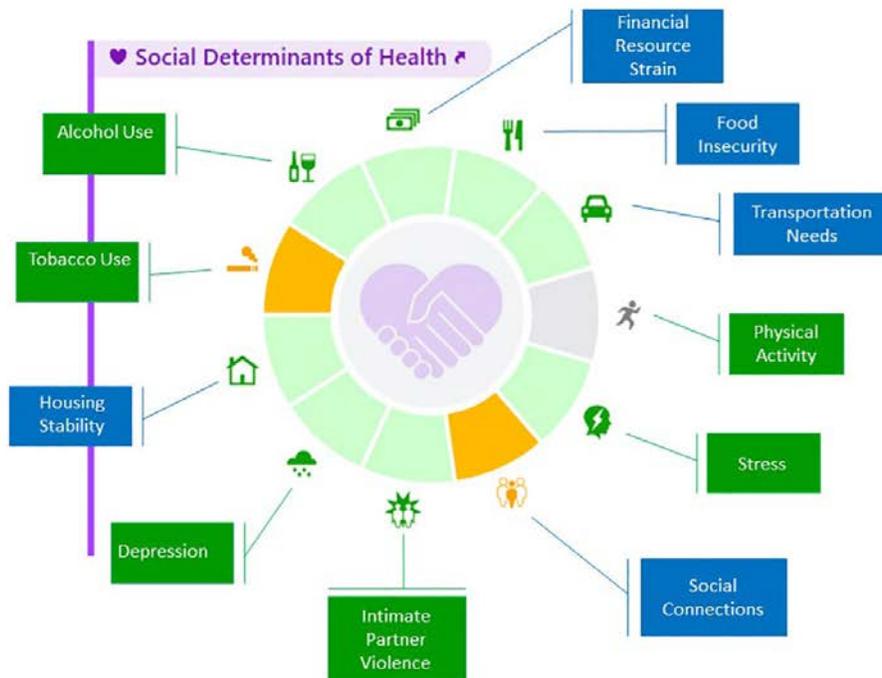
“Social and economic determinants of health, such as income, housing and social supports account for about 40% of an individual’s overall health,” said Paula Morgen, ThedaCare director of community health and co-leader of the SDOH Initiative. “Caring for social needs, along with medical needs, is a key component of our Population Health strategy. For example, when someone goes from being homeless to being affordably and safely housed, primary care visits increase 18%, while ED visits decrease 20%. That’s Population Health,” said Morgen.

Patients visiting sites will receive a notification in their MyThedaCare/MyChart account approximately seven days prior to their appointment requesting they complete the Social Determinants of Health Screening, which is a series of questions about food insecurity, financial strain, transportation and housing. Based on their answers, a color-coded wheel populates in the EMR to help providers understand the social needs of a patient, whether they’re doing well, may need some assistance or need critical assistance. Patients at moderate or high risk are connected with community resources by a navigator who follows up to increase the chances that patients receive the help they need. Patients can also participate in the screening at check-in or during their appointment. Soon, a complete database of community resources from Wisconsin 2-1-1 will be downloaded into Epic to ensure patient options are readily available for referral.

The annual screenings for those 18+ are confidential and adhere to HIPAA privacy rules. Patients may decline the screening opportunity.

“Our goal is to treat the whole person and go upstream to improve outcomes. We appreciate our many community partnerships to accelerate our work in Community and

# EPIC SDOH Wheel



## ❖ Social Risk Factors

## ❖ Behavioral Health Risk Factors

As social factors are documented, the SDOH Wheel will update:

- **Green....**no to low risk
- **Yellow...**moderate risk
- **Red.....**high risk
- **Gray.....**no data (patient refused or not screened)



In an effort to advance its Population Health Strategy, ThedaCare is using a new social determinants of health (SDOH) screening tool to identify social needs and connect patients who are struggling with resources.

Population Health, and help our patients live their best lives," said Tara Anderson, co-leader of the SDOH project and manager of care management. "We will explore expanding the social determinants of health screening to other ThedaCare locations in the future."

**ThedaCare, Neenah**

## Connecting Stroke Survivors Virtually

Chronic disease ranked among the top five health issues for Brown County in Aurora BayCare Medical Center's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment. As a comprehensive stroke center, the team at Aurora BayCare Medical Center knows that maintaining their connection to stroke survivors allows for better resilience and emotional health, especially during uncertain times. Taking care of the whole person along the entire care continuum is important every day, even when treatments end.

The problem was learning how to maintain those connections for Stroke Survivors while mitigating COVID-19 transmission risk. The solution was virtual support group meetings.

In 2020, the Aurora BayCare Medical Center team was able to pivot to a virtual format and not only continue hosting monthly meetings, but also reach new participants, even if they were not Advocate Aurora Health patients.

One of the main goals of their Stroke Support Group is to provide stroke-related education for meeting participants. While hosting virtual meetings, they were able to bring in speakers from organizations outside of Advocate Aurora Health, even those outside their normal geographic area, to provide valuable education.

The support group participants expressed gratitude for the social connection during a time when there was so little opportunity for connection and greater amounts of anxiety.

Aurora BayCare Medical Center was happy to play a small role in taking care of the whole person.

**Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay**

## Hospital-Supported Initiatives

### Forensic Nurses Help Survivors Heal

According to Aurora Medical Center-Oshkosh's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, the rate of sexual assault and rape for Winnebago County was 12.3 reports per 100,000 people in 2016. However, sexual assault and rape are underreported, and the definition of sexual assault varies across different agencies. Therefore, the numbers may vary depending on the data source.



At Aurora Medical Center-Oshkosh (AMCO), abuse survivors receive care for immediate medical needs in the emergency room. Specially trained forensic nursing experts help guide survivors to healing as soon as their medical care is complete.

The first steps in the healing journey include making important decisions. Forensic nurse examiners (FNEs) explain options and help survivors choose the services that are right for them. The FNEs respect survivor wishes and only provide what is requested with the understanding that survivors can return for additional support later.

Forensic nursing services include forensic evaluation, emotional support, legal advice, assistance in reporting the crime to the police, testimony in court, referrals to other services and preventive care. Together, these lower the risk that a survivor's trauma leads to further health complications.

During 2020, AMCO's forensic nurse examiners provided 149 survivors with trauma-informed care in response to sexual assault, domestic violence and human trafficking. Of those served, 98 people were referred to community partners for continued services and support.

Beyond providing care, AMCO's nurses also conducted four community education, prevention, and outreach training sessions for 115 community members.

### [Aurora Medical Center – Oshkosh](#)

## **Collaborating to Address Food Security**

No matter the barrier influencing a family's food security, access to healthy foods is crucial to maintaining wellness. Adults and children who struggle to access healthy foods

may be at an increased risk for negative health outcomes and health disparities, including obesity.

Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County team members understand the link between food security and health. They partnered with community organizations in 2020 to connect patients and community members to local food resources through three activities:

Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County team members educated 76 women 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased food security concerns for many of community members, increasing the need at local food pantries. Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County continued to provide in-kind food donations, with a total value of \$31,132 donated in 2020. The food pantries then distributed these foods directly to families in need.

The City of Manitowoc Downtown Farmers Market provides access to many locally grown or sourced produce and products. Through a donation provided by Aurora Medical Center-Manitowoc County, the market was able to launch EBT services to market guests in 2020. This increased access to fresh foods for the those in the community who are food insecure and have FoodShare benefits.

### [Aurora Medical Center – Manitowoc County](#)

## Nourishing Mind, Body and Spirit

In 2014, associates at Ascension Calumet Hospital in Chilton, Wisconsin, found a way to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables by using vacant land outside the hospital. Of the 1.7 acres, about half an acre was dedicated to a community garden. The rest of the land around the garden is rented by a local farmer.

“We started off small with a gardening committee of associates, master gardeners through UW-Extension and volunteers,” said Jenny Watts, leader, Regional Community Health Improvement at Ascension Calumet Hospital. “The committee hosted workshops for people who were interested in gardening and learning more about cultivating fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs to help reduce obesity.”



Entrance to the community garden

2020 was the sixth year that the Ascension Calumet Hospital hosted the community garden. Three new raised beds were planted in summer 2020 and used by the community, bringing the total number of raised beds to 33. Twenty-three of the 33 beds were rented to community members. The landscaping class from Chilton High School was unable to help get the garden ready for the 2020 growing season due to COVID-19.

At the end of summer, 92% of raised bed renters increased their fruit and vegetable consumption after growing their own produce. 97% of produce harvested from the hospital's garden plots was sold at the farmer's market. Hosted right outside the hospital's cafeteria, all produce is sold for \$1. 100% of the funds raised through the beds and produce sold is invested back into the garden. Proceeds from the farmer's market helped fund a new watering system in the garden for renters to use on their raised beds.

“We know proper nutrition is critical to overall health and wellness,” said Watts. “By increasing access to fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, we’re cultivating wellness conversations and working to reduce obesity in our community.”

**Ascension Calumet Hospital, Chilton**

## Increasing Access for Community Members

Things that seem like small problems might turn into big problems if not dealt with. When someone feels like something has changed in their body and it doesn't resolve quickly, it may be time to see a doctor. But what should they do if they don't have access to a Primary Care Provider (PCP)?

In our most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), access to health care was ranked as a top issue by key informants for Marinette and Menominee counties. To address this in 2020, Aurora Medical Center-Bay Area:

- Linked people to providers. 187 people who did not have a PCP and arrived at our hospital for a non-emergent emergency department visit saw an Aurora Medical Group PCP within 28 days.
- Expanded access to care. In 2019, the ratio of residents to PCPs was 1,450:1 for Marinette County, compared to the Wisconsin average of 1,250:1, and 2,590:1 for Menominee County, compared to the Michigan average of 1,260:1, meaning there are many fewer PCPs available to residents in our service area. In response, we opened our Menominee clinic on August 3 and accommodated 1,336 patients through 1,657 visits in 2020.
- Supported our local free clinic. Our providers donated time to support the Twin Counties Free Clinic and we provided 12 clinic patients with discounted tests and procedures.
- Helped uninsured patients gain coverage. In 2019, 7% of Marinette and Menominee County residents were uninsured, according to County Health Rankings. During 2020, our financial advocate completed 418 financial counseling sessions and 75 Medicaid applications.

**Aurora Medical Center – Bay Area, Green Bay**

## A Life-Saving Partnership

In the fall of 2020, a 12-year-old boy in Sheboygan County called 911 when his mother went into cardiac arrest. As a result of a program that Advocate Aurora Health implemented with the Sheboygan County Sheriff's Office, dispatchers walked him through what to do over the phone. With bravery and strength, he performed CPR until emergency medical services arrived and likely saved his mother's life.

“About five years ago, we started our *When Minutes Matter* campaign supported by the Aurora Foundation,” Dr. Steven Zils, out-of-hospital medical director for Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center and medical director for Sheboygan County Sheriff's Office and 911 center, said.

“The aim was to improve cardiac arrest survival rates in Sheboygan and Ozaukee Counties. Part of this effort involved implementing a system called Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) in the 911 centers in each county.”

This computerized system has a process that allows dispatchers to triage calls and provide prearrival instructions to callers/bystanders in different cases including cardiac arrest, choking, childbirth, severe bleeding, and more. With this system and training, the dispatcher can now provide medical advice and life-saving instructions over the phone. Dr. Zils and his team provides ongoing support and training to this program.

“It continues to be rewarding to see the great patient outcomes we have when we partner as a health organization with our community partners,” Dr. Zils said.

### Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center

## Collaborating with Schools to Provide Mental Health Navigator

Agnesian HealthCare, a member of SSM Health, is collaborating with the Fond du Lac School District to address the mental, behavioral and social needs of vulnerable and underserved children, families and caregivers in three elementary schools with the creation of a mental health navigator position.

“Mental health is a community health priority in Fond du Lac County, as well as addressing social determinants of health,” according to Matt Doll, PhD, director of Outpatient Behavioral Health, Treffert Center and Autism Services. “Limited access to mental/behavioral health services and professionals, inadequate household and social support systems, health literacy, and discrimination are or can be gap for the successful thriving of some Fond du Lac area children.”

Within the three schools, on average, 57.7% of the students are persons of color, 82.7% are categorized as coming from economically disadvantaged households, and about 6% experience homelessness.

The mental health navigator works with school principals, teachers and counselors to identify and schedule culturally competent training and information on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma informed care (TIC), and question persuade refer (QPR) suicide prevention techniques. The navigator is also using assessment and screening tools to identify unmet mental, behavioral health and social service needs among the children, families and caregivers. Collaboration is also ongoing with the Fondy CARES program

to set up community-based mental health therapy within the school and a system of referrals for children, families and caregivers to obtain mental/behavioral health services and to obtain services and resources to address unmet needs.

### Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

## Care for Mental Health

According to a study published in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine*, people with anxiety and depression are more likely to report an increase in alcohol use during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the key health issues identified in Holy Family Memorial’s (HFM) 2020-2022 Community Health Needs Assessment is alcohol use or abuse.



In a *Coping with COVID-19* video, Amanda Taylor, a clinical therapist at HFM Behavioral Health, offers tips for staying resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In February 2020, HFM supported the opening of CORE Treatment Services, a nonprofit, 16-bed residential and day-treatment AODA (alcohol and other drugs of abuse) facility, in the former convent on the HFM campus. While COVID greatly delayed the full opening of the facility, CORE did open and has begun to make a significant impact in the community.

Knowing that the right support is integral to successfully navigating many concerns, HFM Behavioral Health created *Coping with COVID*. This series of videos was originally developed to help HFM employees cope with the stresses of COVID-19, but quickly became a resource for the community and local schools and businesses to guide people through coping with the unique situations related to COVID-19 instead of following negative alternatives.

Because alcohol abuse is linked to suicides, HFM offered QPR—Question, Persuade, Respond—Suicide Awareness Training to its staff. The training provided participants to learn how to recognize the warning signs that someone may be thinking about suicide, and how to help them.

### Holy Family Memorial, Manitowoc

## Caring For the Whole Person - Mind, Body and Spirit

Based on the data presented and the prioritization process of the community stakeholders, mental health was one of three priorities selected in Ascension hospitals' Community Health Needs Assessment. Ascension Wisconsin is a member of two Tri-County Regional coalitions—Prevent Suicide-Fox Cities (formerly Zero Suicide) and Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Advisory Committee.

On December 4, 2020, Prevent Suicide-Fox Cities launched its new awareness campaign, Strong Minds 4 Men with a comprehensive communications and media toolkit to support interested organizations. A "Man Tab " was created on the new Mental Health Connection website, where men can find resources, mental health assessment, videos of men sharing their stories, signs and symptoms, etc. to assist in their mental wellness journey.

Ascension Wisconsin awarded the NEW Mental Health Connection \$31,000 for mental health and suicide prevention efforts that include support for a mental health navigator and victim response team, which are the next primary focus areas. The team also is reviewing best practices for adult behavioral health support in the workplace. There is an evaluation plan to track the success of the campaign that will run through 2021.

[Ascension Wisconsin - Fox Valley Region, Appleton, Oshkosh and Chilton](#)

## Innovative Telehealth Experience for Kid's Mental and Behavioral Health Care

Youth in Wisconsin were already experiencing alarming rates of mental health hospitalizations, suicide rates and depression before the COVID-19 pandemic; now, the effects of the pandemic are exacerbating what was already a growing national and state crisis. In 2020, Children's Wisconsin quickly pivoted to redesign virtual capabilities and serve kids through telehealth services. Before April 2020, Children's did not have a single telehealth visit for mental and behavioral health, but in the year since, the mental and behavioral health team has completed nearly 60,000 telehealth visits with kids across the state. In fact, even as in-person visits have resumed, telehealth still accounts for most of the mental and behavioral health appointments.

Led by a couple of innovative therapists, Children's took tele-therapy to the next level by creating virtual therapy offices. These "Zoom rooms" are kid-friendly, interactive web interfaces that kids and parents can explore with their provider. Each room they enter has different themes, décor and interactive resources that kids can explore. In addition,

Children's brought on three child and adolescent psychiatrists who specialize in providing telehealth. By quickly expanding the psychiatrist team through a hybrid model of in-person and telehealth sessions, Children's has greatly expanded timely access to kids who need their care. Most importantly, use of this audio and video technology enabled us to reach kids who face barriers to accessing care, whether that be issues with transportation or challenges in taking time off from school or work.

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

## Drug Take Back Day at HSHS St. Mary's in Green Bay

In April 2021, State Attorney General Josh Kaul announced that law enforcement agencies across the Wisconsin would be participating in a Drug Take Back Day later that month. Coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, the efforts provided a safe disposal of medications as well as increasing awareness about the abuse of prescription medications.



*Jon Motquin, Hazardous Waste Facilitator, HSHS with Green Bay police officer*

On April 24, 2021, HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, in collaboration with Green Bay Police Department, participated as a drop-off location for area residents to safely dispose of unneeded medications.

"They get bagged up, taped up and they are going to be brought to a hazardous waste company where they will incinerate them as waste. From there they serve as fuel for cement kilns. Here, we take them back so they don't get thrown in the garbage," said John Motquin, hazardous waste facilitator, Hospital Sisters Health System.

During the three-hour event, HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center collected 486.8 pounds of unwanted and expired prescription medications.

[HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center, Green Bay](#)

## Prescription Medication Take Back

Healthy Sheboygan County 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the Drug Enforcement Administration held a Prescription Drug Take Back Day at three locations throughout Sheboygan County on April 24, 2021. To help create awareness surrounding the issue of prescription medication abuse in Wisconsin, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, in collaboration with local law enforcement, participated as a drop-off location for area residents to safely dispose of unneeded medications.



Colleagues sorting through donations during the Prescription Drug Take Back event at HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital on April 24, 2021.

During the three-hour event, HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital collected 13 boxes of medications for a total weight of 360 lb. Additionally, one box of EpiPens, aerosols and three 28-gallon sharps containers were collected.

**HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, Sheboygan**

## Bringing Fresh Foods to Oconto County

According to the Oconto County Health Department, 30% of adults in Oconto County are considered obese. Through the Community Health Needs Assessment for Oconto County, community members shared feedback that access to healthy food options would assist them in making healthier life choices.

For the first time, Oconto County hosted its very own farmers market during the summer months of 2021. The weekly market catered to families with fresh produce stands, live music, craft vendors, children's activities and more.

To support food pantries in Oconto County, HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital served as a drop-off location for produce. Shoppers were encouraged to purchase extra produce at the farmers market to donate. Additionally, shoppers could donate produce grown at home to support the cause.

These efforts directly align with HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital's and Oconto County's objectives to improve nutrition and physical activity, which is a top-three health need in the Community Health Needs Assessment.

**HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital, Oconto Falls**

## Farm to Lunch Trays

HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center provided sponsorship to Wello in support of their Farm to School initiative. The program is an established, non-profit organization whose vision is to make the Greater Green Bay community the healthiest in the nation. Through Farm to School, Wello focuses on supporting the community in eating better, moving more and building social and community connections to improve overall health and well-being.

The program works with food service departments for local schools to aid in purchasing locally sourced, nutrient-dense meals for students. Examples of school-based partnerships included planting fruit trees at three elementary schools, collecting maple syrup and purchasing a tabletop growing system for a local middle school. To encourage the use of local produce throughout the winter months, kitchen equipment like dehydrators and vacuum sealers were purchased.

The sponsorship provided directly aligns with the hospitals' and Brown County's objectives around addressing obesity, which is a top 3 health need in the Community Health Needs Assessment.

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

## Rogers Opens Services in Sheboygan to Expand Access to Care

As part of its goal to increase access to mental health and addiction services, Rogers Behavioral Health recently opened an outpatient clinic and supportive living option in Sheboygan.



Rogers clinicians and leaders, a Rogers advocate, and the Sheboygan mayor celebrated the opening with a ribbon cutting on July 20, 2021.

Rogers' multidisciplinary teams provide partial hospitalization care for six hours a day, five days a week for OCD, anxiety, depression and other mood disorders, as well as co-occurring substance use disorder.

The 10,000-square-foot outpatient clinic serves up to 12 adolescents and 28 adults at a time.

"I lived here my whole life, and I never imagined a clinic like this would come to Sheboygan and we would have these resources available to such a small, tight-knit community that needs them so desperately," said Erin Johnson, the clinic's mental health nurse practitioner.

To further support the community, Rogers is offering its first-ever supportive living services adjacent to the clinic. The homelike setting accommodates 12 adults at a time and provides stability during treatment as patients prepare to transition back into everyday life.

Unlike traditional supportive living facilities that serve individuals with the same diagnosis, Rogers is available to patients in both the Mental Health and Addiction Recovery and OCD and Anxiety partial hospitalization programs.

In addition to Sheboygan, Rogers added adolescent and adult treatment options for Depression Recovery in West Allis and Brown Deer, as well as adolescent partial hospitalization care for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery and Depression Recovery in Kenosha. Rogers also recently broke ground on a residential care center in Brown Deer to open in 2022.

### Rogers Behavioral Health, Sheboygan

## ThedaCare and Partners Launch ED2Recovery+ Program

Every three years, ThedaCare completes a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) for each of its 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.

### ED2R+ Program Planning

In August 2019, ThedaCare Community Health Action Teams (CHAT) from Wild Rose and Fox Cities, hosted a plunge on Addiction. A plunge is a day-long event where diverse CHAT team members gather those most affected by or involved in solving an issue, work together to share knowledge and develop solutions for change. After the plunge and debrief,

both the Fox Cities and Wild Rose teams identified recovery coaching as a strategy that would help reduce opioid addiction by encouraging people to seek treatment and avoid recidivism.



*Both the Fox Cities and Wild Rose Community Health Action Teams identified Recovery Coaching as a strategy that would help reduce opioid addiction by encouraging people to seek treatment and avoid recidivism.*

After months of dedicated planning, ThedaCare is pleased to announce the Emergency Department to Recovery Plus (ED2R+) program. ThedaCare is partnering with Apricity to initially offer the program at ThedaCare Medical Center-Berlin, ThedaCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah and ThedaCare Medical Center-Shawano.

"When we learned about the ED2R+ program and successes, we recognized the opportunity to leverage the partnerships at the table, including ThedaCare's emergency departments," said Tracey Ratzburg, ThedaCare community health coordinator. "When someone comes to the ED in the middle of an addiction crisis, it is often the end of the road, they don't know where else to go. ED2R+ offers hope and support from a peer that walked a similar journey."

The ED2R+ program model offers peer support services by recovery coaches or certified peer support specialists. These services offer referrals, support, and follow up for treatment and recovery to individuals who have history of or experienced an opioid or stimulant overdose and are taken to the emergency department. Recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists may also offer services outside of emergency department settings including through EMT services, first responders, public health departments, probation and parole offices, law enforcement and treatment and/or recovery centers. This statewide peer support network functions as a component of the State Opioid Response.

**ThedaCare, Neenah**

# Southeastern Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$928,299,096**

## Charity Care

### We're Grateful for Our Patients

Aurora Medical Center-Grafton frequently receives notes from patients thanking them for the care they received, a nurse who went above and beyond, or the financial assistance they are approved for. Patients share how their experiences with their team members moved them in special ways, leaving them with a happy heart and a new outlook on life.

Our patients change us too.

One patient and his wife arrived at the Emergency Department seeking care. They recently returned from a decade-long mission trip when the man fell ill. Unfortunately, after being out of the country for so long, they had no medical insurance or savings.

"When I met this patient, I was in awe as he and his wife told me their story," said the financial advocate. "They dedicated so many years to help rural villages in other countries renew life by building sustainable agriculture, making lives better for everyone living there."

"The patient needed surgery and ongoing care. After completing a financial assessment, I was able to approve him for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program," the advocate said. "I was so thankful I was able help this couple in their time of need after they have spent their lives helping so many others."

When asked how she felt after working with the couple, the financial advocate replied, "It was a humbling experience to say the least."

**Aurora Medical Center - Grafton**

### Help to Relieve the Stress

The Aurora Medical Center-Washington County financial advocate responded to a call from a man who recently received care at the hospital. He told the advocate that he wanted to set up a payment plan for his bill.

"I'm self-employed and I don't have any insurance," the man said. "During the last open enrollment, I tried purchasing insurance through the Marketplace, but I couldn't afford the premiums because my business has a lot of expenses too."

After hearing his story, the financial advocate asked the man if they could complete a financial assessment together. The man agreed.

The man's income was over the limit for Medicaid. However, he was approved for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

After sharing the news, the Advocate could hear the man starting to get emotional. "I didn't know this type of program existed," he said. "I was so worried about paying this bill that I couldn't focus on anything else."

A few days after their conversation, the man called the financial advocate one more time. "Ever since I received that approval, I can feel myself getting better and better every day," he said. "Thank you for taking that stress away from me."

**Aurora Medical Center - Washington County, Hartford**

### A Little Help for a Father

A man was raising his daughter on his own for several years. The two of them were doing well together, until the man started feeling ill.

After work one day, the man went to the Aurora Medical Center-Summit Emergency Department with chest pain. After the physician completed a medical examination, he determined the man had a heart condition and needed ongoing care. The diagnosis also meant the man would not be able to return to work.

While still in the hospital, the man discovered that his insurance premium had not been paid and his insurance coverage had ended. His bank account had been hacked and his auto payment for his insurance premium was never completed.



The hospital's financial advocate met with the man. After completing a financial assessment, the financial advocate was able to approve him for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program. The financial advocate was also able to help the man apply for Medicaid to cover the ongoing care he needs.

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

### **Bread of Healing Clinic**

One of Advocate Aurora Health's parish nurses met a young man during a meal program at Eastbrook Church in early 2020. The man approached the Parish Nurse and informed her that he was recently released from jail, had no health care, and needed medications to control his blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

The Parish Nurse referred the man to Bread of Healing Clinic, a free clinic located in the lower level of the same church where they met.

Bread of Healing operates clinics out of three locations on Milwaukee's North Side, including Cross Lutheran Church, Eastbrook, and Florist Clinic at Traveler's Rest Ministries. The three clinics provide medical care and behavioral health services for uninsured adults. Advocate Aurora Health has partnered with the Bread of Healing Clinic since it opened 21 years ago to serve people experiencing financial or other barriers to quality health care.

In 2020, Bread of Healing cared for 1,400 patients through 5,800 visits at their three clinic sites. Clinic providers cared for five patients every month through the Specialty Access for Uninsured Patients Program and 130 patients received dental cleanings and care from volunteer dentists. Additionally, Advocate Aurora Health donated 500 flu vaccines to the clinic to increase access for their patients.

The man was able to see a provider at Bread of Healing Clinic within a week of meeting the parish nurse. At that time, he received one week of medications. With Bread of Healing as his new health home, the man is managing his symptoms and staying well.

#### [Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Milwaukee](#)

### **A Calm Approach**

A young man in his early 20s arrived at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital while he was experiencing a mental health crisis. The team he was working with decided it was best to admit the man so they could help him get on track with his medication and ensure his symptoms were stable.

When the patient's case manager learned he was uninsured, he reached out to the hospital's financial advocate for help. The case manager informed the financial advocate that the patient was not violent, but also wasn't cooperating when asked to share information.

The financial advocate decided to meet with the patient in person. When she arrived at the inpatient unit where the man was staying, she introduced herself and explained that she was there to help him.

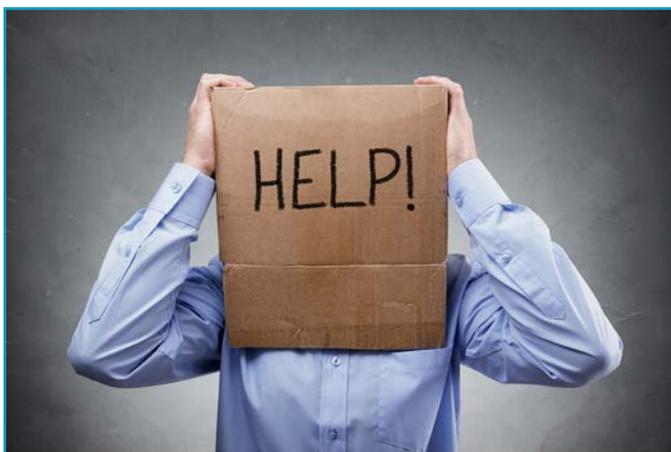
The patient was resistant at first but that did not deter the financial advocate. The advocate took all the time that was needed to slowly walk through each survey question with the patient, one-by-one until they were able to complete a full financial assessment together. Thanks to the calming presence of the financial advocate, the patient felt comfortable.

The man was approved for a 100% discount on the care he received through the Advocate Aurora Patient Financial Assistance Program.

After he was discharged from the hospital, the man returned to the campus for outpatient services. Before one of his appointments, the man visited the financial advocate and to express his gratitude and apologize for the behavior he displayed during their first meeting.

The advocate occasionally still sees the patient on the hospital campus when he receives his outpatient care, and he appears to be doing very well.

#### [Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa](#)



### **Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic**

A man in his 50s believed his health was good until he began experiencing unusual symptoms. The symptom that bothered him the most, blurred vision, was affecting his job.

The man went to Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center's Emergency Department and was admitted for an unexpected diagnosis: uncontrolled diabetes. The hospital team helped get his diabetes under control with insulin during his brief hospital stay and referred him to Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic for follow-up care.

Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic is one of Milwaukee's oldest health clinics serving a largely Hispanic community with a high percentage of uninsured people. The clinic is operated by Aurora Health Care Inc. and services provided include specialty, diagnostic and treatment services, behavioral health screenings and social services. Clinic team members also staff the nearby Salvation Army shelter and clinic to provide refugee screenings and basic medical care to people experiencing homelessness.

The man worked with a nurse practitioner at the clinic who taught him how to control his diabetes through lifestyle changes. Today, the man is no longer on insulin and is back at work in the same capacity as before learning he had diabetes.

In 2020, Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic served over 2,300 unique patients, including 664 new patients, though 12,178 visits. The clinic also collaborated with the American Lung Association in fall to provide flu vaccinations for nearly 700 Hispanic residents on Milwaukee's South Side and delivered 79 flu vaccines at the Mexican Consulate.

#### [Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee](#)

### **Help When You Miss Open Enrollment Deadlines**

If you miss your employer's benefits enrollment deadline, you could lose insurance coverage for you and your family. Missing the deadline also means that you could be unable to make changes or enroll in new benefit programs until the next open period.

This is exactly what happened to Trish.

Trish arrived at the Emergency Department at Aurora St. Luke's South Shore for medical care. She was distraught when she arrived because she was in pain, but also because she was uninsured.

After they completed Trish's medical care, her care team asked the hospital's financial advocate to speak with her.

Trish explained to the advocate that she had tried to get insurance through her employer, however, she didn't submit the paperwork as instructed, causing her to be denied for health care coverage until the next open enrollment period. Trish was visibly shaking at the thought of receiving a bill from her hospital visit.

After hearing Trish's story, the financial advocate helped her complete a financial assessment. She was able to help Trish gain approval for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance program.

“You’re my hero!” Trish cried to the financial advocate when she heard the news.

Trish assured the financial advocate that she would request assistance from her employer’s human resources department during the next open enrollment period so she would have health care coverage in the future.

### [Aurora St. Luke’s South Shore, Milwaukee](#)

## Help When the Unexpected Happens

Most of us expect to experience changes in our health as we grow older, which often requires regular medical treatment to remain well. However, while in their early 20s, people often expect to remain healthy.

Until the unexpected happens.

One weekend, a young woman arrived at the Aurora West Allis Medical Center for emergency care. After her medical needs were met, she was able to go home.

The Monday following her visit, the hospital’s financial advocate noticed the patient didn’t have insurance listed and reached out to the patient. The patient insisted she would pay for her medical bills out-of-pocket and wanted to set up a payment plan.

Aware of the large balance the patient had, the financial advocate suggested they complete a financial assessment to see if she had other options available to her. The patient agreed.

The patient was approved for a 100% discount on the emergency care she received and the medications she required through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program. The financial advocate was also able to provide some education on purchasing coverage through the marketplace during open enrollment.

The patient was thankful for the assistance and promised the financial advocate that she would review her options through the marketplace when open enrollment begins.

### [Aurora West Allis Medical Center, West Allis](#)

## Help When Your Coverage Ends

A man in his early 60s was able to retire early and had been living off his pension and social security. He had no health issues, and he purchased insurance through the marketplace. He planned to keep this coverage until he became eligible for Medicare.

Then things changed.

After the man hadn’t been feeling well for a couple of weeks, he went to the Emergency Department at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center. He was experiencing breathing issues and severe back pain. During their medical evaluation, the staff found a large mass in the man’s lungs.



The man required surgery and other medical care to treat his condition. Unfortunately, the man forgot to pay his most recent insurance premium, and his insurance provider dropped him from his coverage. The man didn’t realize this had happened until after he arrived at the hospital.

Unsure of what his payment options were, the man reached out to the hospital’s financial advocate who completed a financial assessment with him. The financial advocate was able to help the man gain approval for a 100% discount on the medical care he required through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

To meet his long-term needs, the financial advocate also helped the man begin the process to apply for disability to pay for his ongoing medical needs.

### [Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, Elkhorn](#)

## Helping Fill a Gap in Patient Coverage

Medical conditions don’t always wait until your benefits kick in to develop.

When our hospital’s financial advocate entered Mary’s room at Aurora Medical Center-Burlington, she could immediately see apprehension on Mary’s face.

To ease the patient’s nerves, the financial advocate calmly explained why she was there. “My role is to help uninsured patients find assistance to help them pay for their medical bills,” the advocate said. “I saw on your hospital record that you are currently uninsured, and I am here to help. Is this a good time?”

Mary agreed to work through the financial assessment with the advocate. She seemed to relax more and more as the assessment went on.

Mary informed the financial advocate that she would be covered by Medicare starting the following month. However, she had no coverage to help pay for the care she already received.

The advocate was able to approve Mary for a 100% discount through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance program.

Mary was immediately relieved and repeatedly thanked the financial advocate.

“I also left that meeting with a smile on my face,” the financial advocate said. “It was a great feeling to know that I was able to help lift that load from Mary’s shoulders so she could concentrate on getting healthy.”

### Aurora Medical Center - Burlington

## Help When Bills Pile Up

As parents and children age, the parent-child dynamic also grows and evolves too. Sometimes children step in when they learn parents are not able to advocate for themselves any longer.

It’s common for our financial advocates to work with patient family members at the patient’s request.

One example: A woman in her early 60s was experiencing ongoing symptoms. She received care on many different occasions for multiple reasons, and her bills were beginning to pile up.

When the woman’s daughter became aware of the situation, she called the financial advocate at Aurora Medical Center-Kenosha, one of the facilities where her mother received care.

The advocate was able to assist the daughter and her mother in completing a financial assessment. The mother was not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare yet, but she was approved for a 100% discount on her current balance through the Advocate Aurora Health Patient Financial Assistance Program.

The patient and the daughter were both very thankful for the new beginning for Mom.

### Aurora Medical Center - Kenosha

## Expanding Access to Flu Vaccines for Milwaukee Residents

Children’s Wisconsin and Children’s Community Health Plan (CCHP) partnered with the City of Milwaukee Health Department to host four free flu clinics in November 2020 at various north and south side Milwaukee Public Schools during meal pick-up times. The Milwaukee Health Department supplied the vaccines and PPE while Children’s and CCHP provided nurses and registration staff, including Children’s school community health nurses, to administer the vaccines.



Children’s Wisconsin & Children’s Community Health Plan nurses, staff provide flu vaccines for students and families at Milwaukee Public Schools

“We wanted to offer these vaccines at locations that are convenient for families to help make sure our community stays as healthy as possible,” said Mark Rakowski, Chief Operating Officer of Children’s Community Health Plan. “Getting the flu vaccination has a positive domino effect: it contributes to an individual’s health which in turn helps the overall health of the community and helps lower the risk of hospitalization.”

The flu clinics provided nearly 400 immunizations to Milwaukee area residents, increasing access and helping reduce the spread of influenza in our communities. This was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure residents were protected against other viruses, like the flu – particularly for our underserved community members and those facing pandemic-exacerbated health disparities.

### Children’s Wisconsin Hospital - Milwaukee

## New Behavioral Health Clinic to Serve Milwaukee’s South Side Community

The Froedtert & MCW health network has donated \$3.7 million to Sixteenth Street Community Health Center to open a new clinic delivering behavioral health services on Milwaukee’s south side. In collaboration with the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division (BHD), the clinic will offer

community-based behavioral health and substance use services focused on prevention, early intervention and same-day access. The new clinic will be located at 1635 W. National Ave.

“Behavioral health and substance use are consistently named by our community as significant health needs in Milwaukee and beyond,” said Cathy Jacobson, president and CEO of Froedtert Health. “In conjunction with our previously announced partnership with Sixteenth Street to increase community-based access to primary care, this additional investment will enhance access to behavioral health services within the heart of Milwaukee. Partnering with Sixteenth Street and BHD will enable us to achieve a sustained impact addressing behavioral health needs that will truly make a difference in the health of our community.”

Located in one of the four Milwaukee County ZIP codes with the highest number of individuals in need of behavioral health services and a significant number of Spanish-speaking residents, the new clinic is well positioned to help provide culturally relevant behavioral health services that best meet the community’s needs.

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

### **Community Outreach Health Clinic Celebrates 20 Years**

Since 2000, the Community Outreach Health Clinic in Menomonee Falls has been a beacon of hope for uninsured patients across Waukesha, Milwaukee, Washington and Ozaukee counties in need of health care services. Each year there are more than 1,000 patient visits with men and women seeking basic medical care, laboratory tests and counseling sessions for general psychiatry and alcohol and drug abuse.



Many patients visiting the clinic are in need of guidance and education to manage diabetes, hypertension and other chronic conditions. That was the case for Wayne, a patient who was sick and didn’t know where to turn when he lost his job and his medical insurance.

“The clinic saved my life in 2019,” said Wayne, who lives in Milwaukee. “If I didn’t have a place to get my blood pressure, diabetes, thyroid and heart checked, I would have ended up in the emergency room and I may not be here today. The volunteers are great and I felt comfortable right away. They treat patients with dignity and respect. There are no words to describe how thankful I am for the care I’m receiving.”

Pamela Parker, a founding member of Community Memorial Hospital, was instrumental in bringing the clinic to life.

“Volunteer nurses, physicians, pharmacists and clerical assistants were recruited from within the hospital,” Pam said. “Local physician clinics and contributions from drug company suppliers provided ‘medication samples’ for distribution to patients. The hospital’s diagnostic services were made available without cost to the patient.”

Linda Smith, a trusted and enthusiastic nurse practitioner passionate about providing health care for the underserved, helped open the clinic and remains today. She works closely with nurses Angie Palese and Julie Brady.

For Debbie, who recently lost medical insurance, the clinic is a refuge.

“I’ve been struggling to manage my diabetes, hypertension and cholesterol,” Debbie said. “Medications for each of those illnesses are expensive and my income is limited. I appreciate that the staff really listens. In 2018, I lost my husband and both of my parents unexpectedly in the span of 10 days. It’s been a difficult time, especially emotionally. I feel like the health clinic staff are watching out for me after all I’ve been through. I’m so lucky I found this clinic.”

#### [Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital, Menomonee Falls](#)

### **Local Mom Gets New Smile and Dream Job with Help from the Albrecht Free Clinic**

Chrystal’s adult life started normally enough as a stay-at-home mother of five. However, a drug addiction that began with legal pain killers for a condition that developed during pregnancy ultimately led to a heroin addiction. Her husband also became entangled in the downward spiral of addiction and lost his life to an overdose. After getting in trouble with the law and having her children taken away, Chrystal decided to make a change and get clean.

Chrystal had been sober for three years when she sought care at the Albrecht Free Clinic because her employer did not offer health insurance. The clinic provider treated Chrystal’s illness, and she was also referred to the clinic dentist for dentures since she had lost most of her teeth due to her prior drug use. After several visits, she had a healthy, happy smile and a brand-new set of teeth.

During another clinic visit, Chrystal shared her frustration that because of her criminal record, she had not been able to pursue her dream of becoming a counselor. Clinic staff set up a meeting with the Ozaukee County sheriff who suggested she become a peer support specialist, and with support from Senator Duey Strobel, the course that Chrystal needed to take for that position was offered locally.



Chrystal completed the course and was offered the peer support specialist position with Wisconsin Community Services where she supports individuals in crisis due to life events, such as suicide attempts and mental health hospital stays. She was recently asked to launch a new program that works with hospital emergency rooms to offer support to patients admitted for drug abuse or overdose.

Chrystal is grateful for the Albrecht Free Clinic's support. "They are the most caring people," she said. "They felt like family and were interested in what was going on in my life. I would not be in the role I am today if not for their help. They gave me my smile back!"

The Albrecht Free Clinic has provided free medical and dental care to thousands of uninsured and underinsured residents of Washington County since 1996. Health care providers, nurses and volunteers donate their time and expertise to help improve the health and quality of life of patients. The clinic has a strong partner in Froedtert West Bend Hospital, which provides support through laboratory and diagnostic tests, case management, grants and other donated clinical services.

[Froedtert West Bend Hospital, West Bend](#)

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Access Through Advocate Aurora Health's COVID Response

Advocate Aurora Health swiftly implemented a robust response to save lives and support communities in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Strategies included:

#### Advocate Aurora Safe Care Promise

Through the Safe Care Promise, providers accommodated over 440,000 virtual and telephone visits to provide clinical care for Wisconsin patients while minimizing COVID-19 transmission risk.

### Vaccinations

Advocate Aurora Health's greatest priority is delivering the COVID-19 vaccine safely and equitably. As of July 2021, they completed 177,599 partial and 178,062 full vaccinations of patients, team members, and community members across Wisconsin. They partnered with community organizations, providing staffing and operational support for vaccine clinics targeting Black and Hispanic community members. Over 6,000 people received vaccinations through the Midtown Health Center, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, and Milwaukee Health Services collaborations.

### Testing

In partnership with state and local agencies, Advocate Aurora Health supported 13 community-based, drive-thru testing sites, performing 61,356 COVID tests valued at \$6.85 million.

### Capacity-building

Advocate Aurora Health donated over one million masks and other personal protective equipment to food programs, shelters, emergency responders, FQHCs, free clinics, and faith-based organizations. Team members worked with partner organizations to create safe reopening plans and operate community-based vaccination clinics and testing sites.



### Reliable COVID-19 information

The Advocate Aurora COVID-19 Resource Center Page provides access to reliable information to help people make informed health decisions. In 2020, the website received 1.47M pageviews including 86,468 clicks on the online symptom checker and 7,419 clicks to the Symptom Checker Hotline (1-866-443-2584).

[Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee](#)

## From the Gym to the Front Line

Transportation is often cited as a barrier to access medical care. During the pandemic it became an even greater challenge for people who were ill with COVID-19 but still needed to get to appointments or find a way home when they were discharged from the hospital. Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, taxi and rideshare providers were unable to transport patients who tested positive—or were waiting for COVID-19 test results. Family members and friends were also uneasy providing rides out of fear they could get sick from their loved one.

Normally, Ascension Franklin works with taxi and rideshare vendors to provide transportation when needed for non-emergent patients who are released from the hospital. But these were not normal times, and the lack of options created

a problem for patients and hospitals but also created an opportunity for Ascension Wisconsin to think outside the box and come up with an innovative solution.



Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Franklin Campus

With most sports activities on hiatus, Mark Alberg, orthopedic service line director, Ascension Wisconsin, volunteered his athletic trainers for the job. The athletic training team already had a 14-passenger van that provided care for sports teams. The athletic trainers retrofitted it with a barrier between the driver and passengers. Ascension Wisconsin also provided an ambulance, which already had safety features in place. All volunteers were given specialized training before participating in the program.

Instead of driving athletes to peak performance, Ascension Wisconsin athletic trainers drove grateful COVID patients 24/7 to and from multiple hospitals across the state when the need was greatest. As the demand decreased, the team continued to provide patient transport from 6:00 a.m. to midnight daily.

“This opportunity gave us insight into what goes into hospital care, and it fostered a lot of goodwill between our teams,” said Alberg. Many COVID-19 patients were also in need of dialysis. So, along with home transports, the team drove many of these patients to their regular dialysis appointments. In addition, in the Fox Valley, athletic trainers focused on helping patients in wheelchairs, who struggled to find transportation with more complex needs, get home from the hospital or to their appointments.

“We wanted to reduce stress for families and patients. It was a difficult time for them, and it was great to ease their minds by providing safe rides,” said Alberg. “It’s nice to work for an organization that thinks creatively and I’m grateful to our team who made an impact by stepping up in a big way and were willing to support this effort.”

### Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Franklin Campus

## Caring for Patients with COVID at Home: Ascension at Home Monitoring Program

On April 23, 2020, Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin launched the Ascension Home Monitoring Program to

compassionately care for patients with COVID-19 outside of the hospital or clinic setting. The program connected at-risk patients with pre-existing conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, chronic respiratory disease or diabetes to 24/7 At Home Monitoring in an effort to reduce hospitalizations and keep patients safe.

Patients were enrolled after an emergency department visit or through an Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin clinic. Once enrolled, the patient was given a home monitoring kit, which included an oxygen monitor, and was monitored 24/7 for 16 days. In the first six months of the program, it gave nearly 700 patients and their providers comfort knowing that they were safely cared for from the comfort of their own homes. Patients appreciated the frequent and direct communication with clinicians and the ability to receive immediate care at the hospital if their symptoms worsened.

### Ascension Wisconsin, Milwaukee

## Children’s Wisconsin Partners in Vaccinating Milwaukee Educators, Children and Community Members

Children’s Wisconsin, in partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin and the City of Milwaukee Health Department, helped provide thousands of COVID-19 vaccines for teachers, school staff and childcare providers at locations across the city in March 2021. Hundreds of employees volunteered over several weeks to help support the vaccination efforts at libraries, schools and the Wisconsin Center.



Children’s Wisconsin providers and staff help vaccinate Milwaukee area educators and childcare workers

“Having vaccines available to provide them to educators and childcare workers allows us to have a pathway through this pandemic,” said Michael Gutzeit, MD, chief medical officer at Children’s Wisconsin. Dr. Gutzeit said staff recognized the vaccination of education and childcare staff would directly affect the physical and mental health of children they care for.

“We knew there were 25,000 teachers and childcare workers that needed shots in arms, and we were committed to do everything we could,” said Peggy Troy, president and CEO, Children’s Wisconsin. This was a huge step on the road to getting kids back to normal and in school.

As more groups became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccines, including kids, Children’s Wisconsin pivoted their strategy to focus on vaccinating our patients and their families as well as supporting various community initiatives to increase access to vaccines closer-to-home for Milwaukee residents. Efforts included partnering with community organizations to ensure that certain populations, particularly those that faced transportation challenges, language barriers and longstanding health disparities, had the opportunity to access information and vaccines in a trusting and familiar environment.

### Children's Wisconsin Hospital - Milwaukee

## Technology and Heart: 24/7 Remote Monitoring and Care Kits for People With COVID-19

While frontline staff continue to care for critical COVID-19 patients with innovative treatments inside the hospital, other staff are attending to those living with COVID-19 outside of the hospital. Inception Health, the health network’s hub for digital health services and innovation aimed at improving the health of individuals and communities, has implemented two tools to try to make life better for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 but don’t require hospitalization: 24/7 remote monitoring support via the GetWell Loop application and COVID Care Kits.

### GetWell Loop 24/7 Remote Monitoring

Currently available at no charge, the COVID-19 GetWell Loop, a HIPAA-compliant digital tool that enables seamless contact with the COVID-19 Care Team, a team of highly experienced nurses available for consultation 24/7, and provides the desired resources identified to be key in optimizing patient support and recovery. Patient responses to daily check-ins and comments in the GetWell Loop trigger “alerts” that assist the COVID-19 Care Team in identifying opportunities for additional assessment to determine if it is safe for the patient to continue to recover at home, or if an escalation of care, such as a virtual visit or in-patient visit is needed. This real-time bidirectional communication has been integral in averting many medical emergencies.



COVID care package

### COVID Care Kits

As a supplemental tool to go along with the support provided by the GetWell Loop digital health tool, the Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin health network and Inception Health also offer COVID Care Kits to people who test positive for the virus. Born from compassion, these care packages are the result of clinical staff wanting their COVID-19 patients to know they are being thought of during recovery while providing additional tools for enhanced monitoring and education. Each COVID Care Kit contains a pulse oximeter, educational materials, hand sanitizer, face coverings and a bottle of water. Bilingual educational materials outline how to self-isolate at home and what to expect when you have COVID-19. It also provides information about the GetWell Loop tool and how to use the pulse oximeter, a tool that measures oxygen levels in the blood. Because COVID-19 can cause silent hypoxia, a condition where a person may feel fine but is severely lacking oxygen, the pulse oximeter can indicate that something is wrong, and treatment is needed.

### Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

## Streamlining COVID-19 Patient Care with Telemonitoring

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, ProHealth Care clinical leaders and providers saw the need to monitor COVID-19 patients at home when they did not require inpatient care. Telemonitoring was launched to ensure the patients managed their own care successfully and to stay in touch with them in case they needed to see a provider in person.

Telemonitoring is considered for patients who have a respiratory-related diagnosis, suspected case of COVID-19, or are recovering from COVID-19. The process helps identify

rapid decompensation that can occur with COVID-19 and ensure quick referrals. The service is complimentary for ProHealth patients who qualify for telemonitoring.

Physicians assess the severity of symptoms and health risk factors to determine whether a patient can safely recover at home and whether they need telemonitoring. Outpatients experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 first schedule virtual visits. The next step is a referral for testing. Inpatients and emergency department patients also may be considered for COVID-19 telemonitoring at discharge.

Upon referral to the program, patients receive a call from a trained telemonitoring nurse. An information sheet, pulse oximeter to measure heart rate and oxygen levels, and a log for recording oximeter readings, body temperature and symptoms are delivered to each patient at home.

Each patient also receives a daily call from a telemonitoring nurse to discuss their log entries, symptoms and health status. The nurse enters the information into the patient's medical record and alerts the patient's physician if there are immediate concerns. Patients can also call a dedicated phone number or their provider if they have questions or concerns.

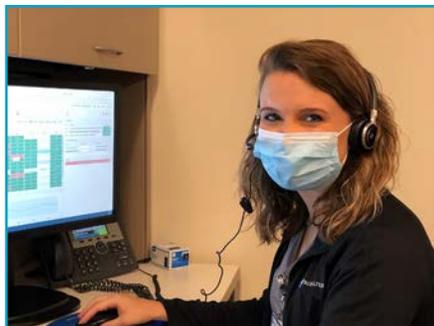
When needed, the patient's physician can provide care instructions or enter orders for additional testing or care. Most patients are monitored for 14 to 21 days.

Telemonitoring is also provided for eligible patients on supplemental oxygen after a complete evaluation. Once home oxygen is ordered by a physician, a respiratory therapist provides oxygen equipment and education to the patient before discharge.

They also receive instructions for oxygen use, a concentrator or oxygen tank and cart on loan, oxygen mask, tubing, and blood pressure cuff to take and log blood pressure readings. They are scheduled for regular virtual visits with a provider.

They also receive nursing assistance as they are weaned off of the oxygen.

**ProHealth Oconomowoc Memorial Hospital,  
Oconomowoc**



*Cassandra Frank, ProHealth Care telemonitoring supervisor, and her team help provide care for COVID-19 patients recovering at home.*

## Rising Above Pandemic Challenges to Deliver Quality Mental Health, Addiction Treatment

As the pandemic carried on into 2021, Rogers Behavioral Health has continued to reach our community and meet the immense need for specialized mental health and addiction care through innovative solutions.



*Jerry Halverson, MD, chief medical officer, and Sue McKenzie Dicks, vice president, Healthy Culture, participated in a Facebook Live in May 2021 on the dos and don'ts when talking about mental health.*

The organization has served more than 6,500 patients through Rogers Connect Care, a virtual care treatment option launched in April 2020. Rogers Connect Care made it easier for patients to access treatment, and many received care who otherwise may have not.

Even though virtual treatment did not always produce the same level of clinical results as in-person treatment for all populations, it did prove to be quite effective for patients with particular disorders. Additionally, many patients shared that they felt at ease and could be more vocal when participating in their home environment.

Rogers will continue leveraging telemedicine and may offer a permanent day treatment service delivered exclusively online for those disorders and populations where it is most effective.

Rogers also launched Facebook Live events in response to the pandemic as a way for the public to connect with experts. Fourteen Facebook Lives have been held to date with a total of nearly 30,000 views.

Additionally, Rogers continued educating the medical community through continuing education webinars, and maintained communication and collaboration with patients' loved ones through virtual support groups and other events for friends and family.

The pandemic greatly impacted people's mental health, and, through innovative solutions, Rogers was able to meet the need while discovering new and effective ways to continue delivering specialized care.

**Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc**

## Health Equity

### Committed to Health Equity

Advocate Aurora Health's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) strategy is anchored by its purpose to help people live well. It is fueled by a commitment to transform its workplace and communities. Advocate Aurora believes everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

Here's how Advocate Aurora is working to close gaps, foster a thriving inclusive environment, and ensure outcomes that are consistent and fair:

**Leading** – Denouncing discrimination and racism by identifying and dismantling structural barriers in our organization. The Advocate Aurora Health Inclusion Council is a newly launched model that addresses the challenge of locally executing its system DE&I strategy by deploying 11 inclusion council core teams made up of 150 team members who are trained in DE&I strategy and key principles and behaviors, such as valuing differences and exhibiting courage.

**Committing** – Advocate Aurora is operationalizing this work by building it into all it does. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Advocate Aurora is focused on strengthening its commitment to support nationally certified enterprises owned by persons of color, women, LGBTQ-identified individuals, and veterans. Advocate Aurora set its business diversity spend goal to 6% and aims to reach a goal of 6.6% in 2021.

**Advancing our Community Strategy** – Advocate Aurora's system-wide Community Strategy is focused on removing barriers to access primary care and behavioral health as well as utilizing community-based programming and partnerships to address community safety, food security, housing security, and workforce development. For example, to address Milwaukee's COVID-19 uptick within the 53204 and 53215 ZIP codes, Advocate Aurora partnered with Carmen South High School to offer virtual consultations with Advocate Aurora physicians and distribute more than 400 COVID-19 kits including educational materials in English and Spanish, masks, hand sanitizer and other supplies at their student orientation.

[Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee](#)

### Assisting People Who are Uninsured in a Time of Need

On October 14, 2020, Community Services offered a free flu shot clinic at Ascension St. Joseph for uninsured residents in the Milwaukee area. The team provided 30 vaccines to individuals along with a package of cleaning items and hand sanitizer that were supplied by the Mission Department. Each

person received hand sanitizer, sanitizer wipes, disinfectant spray, toilet paper and an Ascension water bottle.



*Ascension cleaning supplies*

"The recipients were extremely appreciative of the products and many stated it was a blessing to receive them at this time," said Brenda Buchanan, RN, community services, Ascension Wisconsin.

One recipient said, "My family and I went this morning and there wasn't even a line. Staff were very helpful and kind. And I never expected the complimentary bag of essentials during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wow! Thank you Ascension and Ascension St. Joseph for offering this wonderful service to our community!"

In addition to the flu clinic distribution, the Ascension Wisconsin Community Services team supported the community with a \$10,000 donation of household cleaning supplies and dental hygiene kits to 15 community organizations and neighborhood associations in Milwaukee.

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

### Increasing Access to COVID-19 Vaccinations in Underserved Communities

As part of the commitment to improving the health of the community, the Ascension Wisconsin community services team created a multi-disciplinary team focused on vaccinating underserved and vulnerable populations when they are eligible. The team's work included identifying and developing solutions to barriers, implementing a comprehensive community engagement and outreach plan, proactive outreach and assistance for prioritized patients and creating

multiple mobile and large-scale vaccination clinics to reach the most vulnerable in Racine, Milwaukee and the Fox Valley.

The first large-scale community vaccination clinic was a six-week initiative with Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers to significantly expand access to COVID-19 vaccinations on the south side of Milwaukee. Ascension Wisconsin's community services team provided staffing, operational guidance and process improvement strategies for the vaccine clinic. Between March 10 - April 16, 2021, more than 6,300 vaccines were administered.

To help break down barriers to care, pop-up vaccine clinics were held at familiar community locations where people felt safe—often non-clinical settings like the clinic that was held inside Racine's HALO homeless shelter on March 28, 2021. One month later, Ascension Wisconsin partnered with the Social Development Commission and Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee to host two vaccination clinics in Milwaukee neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These collaborations helped increase the number of vaccinations provided to community members who might not otherwise receive the vaccine. To date, more than 250 vaccines have been administered at pop-up clinics.



*Heather Schimmers, Chief Nursing Officer, Ascension Wisconsin, vaccinates Guillermo and Eva Robelo under supervision of their three-year-old daughter Eileen.*

The team also provided vaccinations where the need is greatest in Milwaukee and Racine at Ascension St. Ben's Clinic, Ascension Angel of Hope Clinic, Ascension Ebenezer Health Resource Center, Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Milwaukee - Family Health Center, Ascension All Saints Family Health Center, Ascension All Saints Hospital - Wisconsin Avenue Campus.

### **Ascension Wisconsin Community Services, Milwaukee, Racine and Appleton**

## **Care-A-Van Provides Health Services Where They Are Most Needed**

The Community Care-A-Van launched in October 2019 to transport registered nurses to two partner sites in Milwaukee to provide education, help in navigating community resources and provide free preventive medical services, such as blood pressure checks, blood sugar testing and vision screenings to community residents. The Community Care-A-Van is sponsored by the Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin health network and the Milwaukee Bucks.



Care-A-Van nurses provide services at United Methodist Children's Services and the Greater Galilee Baptist Church Greater Life Community Center every week. Residents in these neighborhoods have several health disparities, including access to transportation, and are frequent emergency department users, making the Care-A-Van a much-needed resource in the community. Educating residents on preventable health conditions is a dream job for Tierra Hoard, BSN, RN. "I knew I wanted to be in the community," she said. "I want to see a healthier Milwaukee."

**Froedtert Hospital, Milwaukee**

## **Community Health Asthma Management Program Supports Kids and Families for Better Health Outcomes**

Asthma is the most common reason for preventable hospitalizations and emergency department visits for children in Wisconsin, with children under age five experiencing the highest rates. In addition, nearly half of all Wisconsin children with asthma reported missing one or more school days due to asthma. According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America's 2019 report, Milwaukee ranks as the 10th most challenging metropolitan city to live in for people with asthma.

Children's Community Health Asthma Management Program (CHAMP) was established more than five years ago serving families in Milwaukee County with an emphasis on reaching people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and those burdened by health disparities, including people of color.

Through CHAMP, a trained asthma educator meets with parents/caregivers and children to talk about skills for asthma self-management, sharing the signs and symptoms of an attack, ways to eliminate common household triggers, proper medication management and use of asthma action plans. The educator also conducts a home walkthrough to identify environmental triggers, such as dust mites, pet dander, household pests and droppings, and smoke and chemicals that may contribute to or induce an asthma attack. The goal is to increase awareness about the impact of environmental triggers on health and support families in implementing interventions to remediate or minimize the identified triggers.

By working as a coordinated, expanded care team on a child's behalf, CHAMP is able to build trust, increase access to care, establish new care connections and provide coordinated and holistic care that ensures equitable outcomes.

### Children's Wisconsin Hospital - Milwaukee

## ProHealth Care Offers Virtual Bilingual, Dementia-Friendly Workshops



A ProHealth Care workshop attendee with a certificate of workshop completion.

ProHealth Care's Hispanic Health Resource Center is providing education, support and digital tablets to Spanish-speaking community members who care for loved ones with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. The tablets allow attendees to participate in the center's new "Ayudando con Cariño" or "Assisting with Care" workshops.

"The workshops help support older adults so they can continue to thrive in their own homes and neighborhoods," said Saul Juarez Aguilar, center manager.

Trained health promoters engage workshop attendees in topics including dementia-related diseases, community resources, and how caregivers can provide care and support and practice self-care. Included are videos, interactive activities, facilitated dialog, and individualized engagement.

Potential attendees were first asked whether they had digital tools and internet access. A number of them replied that they would need a digital device and personalized training to attend. A grant quickly led to the purchase of the first 25 tablets.

Health care promoters learned how to load digital content, lead virtual programs, use the tablets and teach attendees how to use them. Content was translated from English to Spanish and supplemented with extra materials. Staff were also trained in dementia-friendly practices.

The workshops are the first initiative in a long-term effort to bring dementia-friendly programming to the Spanish-speaking community in Waukesha County.

ProHealth's center is collaborating with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Aging & Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County, and UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health to provide workshop content and evaluate the program. Staff are also working with the Alzheimer's Association and United Community Center in Milwaukee to ensure program efficacy.

Results will be measured using UW School of Medicine tools and ProHealth Research Institute guidance. Each attendee also provides feedback in a separate online meeting. The results will be reviewed by the ProHealth Care Institutional Review Board and provided to the state and university.

### ProHealth Waukesha Memorial Hospital, Waukesha

## Rogers Works to Create an Inclusive, Safe Environment for Transgender, Non-Binary Patients

The LGBTQIA+ community is especially vulnerable to adverse mental health outcomes. For instance, 40% of trans people have attempted suicide in their lifetime compared to 4.6% of the general U.S. population.

Misgendering and deadnaming (using a person's birth name instead of their chosen name) can contribute to an unsafe and alienating environment for the population.

With that reality, Rogers Behavioral Health is working to ensure inclusivity through several new initiatives, including the collection of chosen name, pronouns, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Captured in the electronic health record at admission, patients' chosen names and personal pronouns are easily available to the treatment teams.

"The idea is that everyone who comes into contact with the patient knows the correct name and pronouns and addresses our patients in an affirming way," said Karen Nelson, director, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

This simple act of respect can reduce depression for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In fact, according to a University of Texas at Austin study, when a transgender youth's chosen name is used at school, work, or home, it reduces depressive

symptoms by 71 percent, thoughts of suicide by 34 percent, and suicide completions by 65 percent.



*Rogers' patients' chosen names and personal pronouns are entered into the electronic health record at time of admission.*

Rogers has trained more than 100 admissions employees on how to ask for the information, and it launched an Identity 101 training for all team members to introduce the terminology, concepts, and issues that can often face LGBTQIA+ employees and patients.

#### [Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc](#)

## Local Food Pantry Partnerships Keep Communities Fed and Healthy

Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital partners with the Menomonee Falls Food Pantry and Sussex Area Outreach Services Food Pantry to help feed and educate local families with food drives, a community garden and wellness education and screenings.

Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital's annual Healthy Shelves Drive gathers nutritious food and personal hygiene items that are donated to local food pantries. During the latest drive, 6,000 healthy food and personal hygiene items were donated to help families served by area pantries. Approximately 3,000 of those items were collected to distribute to Waukesha County families.

The Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital community garden also helps supply nutritious food to the communities they serve. Last year, the garden provided 1,478 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to food pantry clients.

Froedtert & MCW staff provide a variety of healthy living education opportunities to food pantry clients every month. Blood pressure screenings, flu vaccines, diabetes risk assessments, smoking cessation information, medication reviews, know your health numbers education and a walk through the food pantry with a dietitian were offered this past year to more than 175 clients.

The goal is to empower our community's most vulnerable population to make better decisions and take action to improve their health. Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital is committed to community partnerships like these to help accomplish that goal.

#### [Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital, Menomonee Falls](#)

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### 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 2020, 805 older adults were served by Aurora Medical Center in Kenosha NICHE-certified Senior Resource Nurses to ensure they received care that promotes function, autonomy, and dignity. 13 clients received home visit referrals, 8 received clinic referrals, 13 completed cognitive screens, and 13 received Aurora at Home referrals.

In addition to the care the Senior Resource Nurses provided:

- 132 community members were educated on Advance Directives with 58 completing an Advance Directive.
- 378 people also received family guidance and support services and 70 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. 57% of those screened were identified as "at-risk" and were referred for support services.
- 68 group exercise classes were provided at the Kenosha Senior Center with an average attendance of 13 individuals per class; 14 new participants attended. Classes prior to the pandemic were in-person, however, after a long pause due to COVID-19, classes went virtual in August.

The Senior Resource Nurses remained connected with clients throughout the pandemic to educate them on COVID-19 and 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](#)

## Removing Barriers to Training

The COVID-19 quarantines and enhanced safety precautions created obstacles for everyone in unexpected ways.

In 2020, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County struggled to gain necessary CPR and First Aid certifications for their summer program.

Having a long history in partnering with Advocate Aurora Health, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County staff reached out to the Aurora Medical Center in Washington County for help. Our Community Outreach Nurse responded to the call and was able to provide virtual education for the entire at Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County team.

This allowed the agency to open their doors and provide a safe environment for area youth to gather this summer. Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County provides a rich variety of programming for children including arts, athletics, leadership, health, life skills, and academic enrichment. In addition to providing staff training, Advocate Aurora Health also participated in anti-bullying educational trainings, general health and behavioral health education sessions, and no-bake cooking classes that focused on how to make nutritional, allergy-friendly granola recipes.

To keep the momentum going, hospital team members hosted a hygiene collection drive in 2020 and donated over 400 items to local community-based organizations. Members of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington County were some of the beneficiaries of this effort.

[Aurora Medical Center - Washington County, Hartford](#)

## Shared Journeys Charter School

Shared Journeys Charter High School in West Allis supports pregnant and parenting teens. The school operates under the belief that all students must be prepared to positively parent their children and achieve post-secondary training in a chosen career to create a positive future for themselves and their families.

Shared Journeys students, parents, community, and staff work together to provide the best learning environment based on each individual student's needs. This helps to ensure academic and overall personal success. Students are educated both in parenting and in academics with potential coursework including: Child Development and Applied Parenting, Career Investigations and Social Aspects of Society, Literacy Investigations, and Compass Learning for online general studies.

Aurora West Allis Medical Center has partnered with Shared Journeys since it opened in September 2012. It continues

to participate in the Healthy Lifestyles Teen Pregnancy Committee, serve on the Shared Journey's Charter School governance board, provide a dedicated facility for the school, and contribute childbirth and parenting classes to the curriculum.

In 2020, nine students were enrolled in Shared Journeys Charter School each quarter on average. Six babies were born to enrolled students, all of which were born full-term. Of those six babies born, five parents successfully initiated breast feeding. Additionally, seven students graduated and six of those graduates enrolled in post-secondary education or job training programs.

[Aurora West Allis Medical Center, West Allis](#)

## Building Capacity for Saukville Community Food Pantry

People don't always understand that Food Insecurity still exists in Ozaukee County, one of the wealthiest counties in Wisconsin. During Aurora Medical Center-Grafton's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, which was completed in 2019 prior to the pandemic, 4% of respondents reported their household went hungry because they were unable to afford enough food in the past year. Additionally,



*Flex Farm Growing Machine donated by Aurora Health Care growing fresh lettuce at the Saukville Community Food Pantry.*

only 35% of households reported they ate the recommended amount of fruit and vegetable servings on an average day. These numbers likely increased in 2020 due to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on community members.

To address this in 2020, Aurora Medical Center-Grafton collaborated with the Saukville Community Food Pantry to support for the Weekend Backpack Program through the Port Washington Saukville School District.

During the school year, Port Washington and Saukville elementary and middle school students were sent home on Fridays with nutritious and easy-to-prepare food items. The goal of the program is to keep those children from going hungry when school meal programs are not available. Approximately 100 kids who may not otherwise have access to food during the days school is not in session, were sent home each weekend with a backpack full of food for their families.

In addition, we also donated a Flex Farm growing machine from Fork Farms. The Flex Farm is a fully self-contained vertical hydroponic system for growing produce. The Saukville Community Food Pantry uses the equipment to grow fresh lettuce. The pantry hopes to add to the fresh produce garden in the future.

#### Aurora Medical Center – Grafton

## Addressing Behavioral Health

It's likely no surprise to anyone that mental health and alcohol and other drug use ranked among the top five health issues for Milwaukee County during Aurora St. Luke's South Shore's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment, which was completed in 2019.

At that time, 18% of South Shore adults reported a mental health condition (such as depression, anxiety disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder) and 31% reported binge drinking in the past month. These numbers likely increased as the COVID-19 pandemic increased stress for most community members.

Aurora St. Luke's South Shore 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 2020:

- 364 behavioral health intake assessments were completed, and appropriate referrals were provided.
- 12.9 was the average inpatient behavioral health services daily census, 3.3 was the average partial hospitalization daily census for mental health, 3.7 was the average intensive outpatient daily census.

- 129 patients were referred to IMPACT from our hospital for alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) screenings and counseling services.

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

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

## Volunteers Making a Community Impact

For more than two decades Ascension All Saints Hospital has been donating food to Racine residents who need it. The Monday Night Meal Program is a joint partnership of First Baptist Church of Racine and the Hospitality Center of Racine. The collaborative program provides a hot, nutritious meal every Monday night throughout the year at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. This program is needed now more than ever as the pandemic has increased the number of families experiencing food insecurity.



Ascension All Saints Hospital volunteers prepare to-go meals for the Monday Night Meal Program in Racine.

Each month Ascension All Saints Hospital volunteers prepare to-go meals and serve up to 100 individuals on a Monday night. Instead of buffet style, as in the past, the team now prepares individual meal boxes that are distributed to participants.

“We love getting out into the community, giving back, and connecting with people where they work and live,” said Kim Leslie, community outreach coordinator, Ascension All Saints Hospital.

Ascension All Saints Hospital is dedicated to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable, and is called to look beyond its hospital walls to support community efforts that help individuals who need it most. Donating food and time to those in need is part of the

organization's commitment to spiritually centered, holistic care, which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities.

"We are grateful for our long-standing collaboration with the wonderful team at Ascension All Saints Hospital," said Rev. Holly Anderle, First Baptist Church of Racine.

### [Ascension All Saints Hospital, Racine](#)

## Educating Behavioral Health Providers

Continuing education is highly valuable for behavioral health professionals and other providers. It ensures that providers' practice is current, aids in building connections with other behavioral health professionals, improves knowledge of the health system, and enhances self-efficacy. It also increases support for community members managing behavioral health issues.

Aurora Psychiatric Hospital team members provided education through two strategic program offerings:

**Continuing Education for Behavioral Health Professionals:** This evidence-based programming aims to improve the diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities in psychiatry and addiction medicine for psychotherapists, psychologists and physicians treating patients and their families. Programming is based on analysis of practitioner needs, as requested by past attendees and topics relevant to medical and allied staff. In 2020, the hospital provided six continuing education programs and four intensive workshops for 392 attendees, of whom 352 (90%) reported they will change a specific aspect of their practice based on what they learned from the lecture or workshop.

**Training to primary care providers and support staff working with behavioral health patients:** 57 providers and staff were trained on how to care for behavioral health patients in primary care settings. Additionally, 25 providers completed Verbal Defense and Influence (VDI) training on how to manage aggressive behavior. The goal of these trainings is to improve the patient experience for individuals managing behavioral health issues while also increasing safety for team members.

Through these and other programs, Aurora Psychiatric Hospital hopes to continue building capacity for behavioral health providers and encourage closer connections with primary care providers to foster a seamless experience for behavioral health patients.

### [Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa](#)

## Mentoring Future Health Care Professionals

LAUNCH is a program that positions Elmbrook Schools high school juniors and seniors in corporate settings during part of their school day. The goal is to help students develop their future career path, build employable skills, inspire creativity and entrepreneurship, and create a regional hub for innovation with local community partners.



*Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Elmbrook Campus*

Ascension Elmbrook works with students in the Medicine and Healthcare strand. Students apply their knowledge through projects and observations, solve problems, and communicate results to Ascension Elmbrook staff.

One project the students worked on was developing a program to help determine how best to choose a primary care doctor. Another multi-semester project is focused on developing a health literacy curriculum for the school district.

"Working in a real-world setting really opens the students' eyes," said Nancy Shea, pharmacist, Ascension Elmbrook. "And we benefit from their fresh outlook and enthusiasm. It's a win-win."

Another recent project the hospital and students are working on together centers on developing a care package for families who have a family member recently diagnosed with dementia, memory loss or cognitive issues. The package will provide supportive information and helpful resources.

Another added benefit of the collaboration is that students are exposed to a wide range of health care careers. When students consider future health care careers, they often think of becoming a doctor or a nurse but by working with Ascension Elmbrook they learn about physical therapy, radiology, lab and many other areas.

There is a growing need for health care professionals in Wisconsin and these students are now better prepared to fill it.

### [Ascension SE Wisconsin Hospital - Elmbrook Campus, Brookfield](#)

## Partnering with BOMB Doula Program

As one of the last remaining hospitals located in the heart of Milwaukee and home to a Level III neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), Aurora Sinai Medical Center is dedicated to supporting families and addressing infant mortality rates in Milwaukee County.

In their newest collaboration, the hospital is teaming up with the City of Milwaukee Health Department's Birth Outcomes Made Better (BOMB) Doula Program. Through this program, the Advocate Aurora Health Midwifery and Wellness team will connect pregnant individuals with a doula who will support them during pregnancy, through birth, and for 12 weeks postpartum. Doula services will include sharing resources and information about the labor process, facilitation of positive communication, and self-advocacy.

Doulas are trained professionals who provide non-clinical emotional, physical, and informational support. During labor and birth, doulas provide hands-on comfort measures to assist with pain management and help ensure birthing people feels their individual needs are being met. During the postpartum period, doulas support parents as they transition into parenthood and provide breastfeeding education and support.

The goals of the BOMB Doula Program include:

- Improving maternal and infant mortality rates
- Diversifying pregnant individuals' options to pregnancy support
- Increasing breastfeeding education and initiation rates
- Connecting people to routine prenatal and postpartum care and health benefits
- Supporting pathways to socioeconomic stability
- Supporting and educating partners/fathers
- Reproductive life and birth planning
- Increasing engagement with healthy behaviors like mental health, attending prenatal visits, exercising, smoking cessation, safe sleep practices, etc.

[Aurora Sinai Medical Center, Milwaukee](#)

## Food is Medicine for Pregnant Women at Ascension St. Joseph

Health systems are called to respond to the needs of all, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. As Ascension's Maternal Health Social Systems Initiative work continues to grow, the team has identified opportunities to advance health equity.

## The Impact of COVID-19

High community demand during the pandemic led to an increase in food insecurity among pregnant and postpartum patient populations. The maternal population is not only at increased risk for complications due to nutritional deficiencies, but many of these women are also vulnerable when it comes to food resources in general, compounding vulnerability with nutritional deficiencies.

To address this problem, the maternal health team at Ascension St. Joseph developed a systematic and scalable food access program to bridge the timing gap between when the need was identified and when the woman was able to access community-based food programs. At the time of service, women and families in need may receive a bag of nutritionally sound food items along with assistance in accessing appropriate and available community resources to continue that support.



*Diagnosis-specific food boxes are available to pregnant women at Ascension St. Joseph by prescription and dispensed through its pharmacy.*

## Food Access: Nutritional Education and Support

Pregnant women are at increased risk for iron deficiency anemia, gestational diabetes and hypertensive disorders. When these conditions are poorly managed, there is an increased risk to maternal health and pregnancy outcomes. Conversely, evidence suggests that nutrition education and counseling may lead to better pregnancy outcomes. This counseling and education may be more beneficial when women also are provided with nutritional support.

That pairing of nutritional support and education led Ascension St. Joseph to develop diagnosis-specific food boxes that are initiated by prescription and then dispensed through its pharmacy. The boxes contain not only the food items, but also recipes and educational materials. The boxes may also allow patients to try unfamiliar foods that they might have been hesitant to try due to limited finances. Patients may discover that they and their families like these choices and choose them again — resulting in healthier patterns of nutrition.

[Ascension St. Joseph Hospital, Milwaukee](#)

## Karen Yontz Women’s Cardiac Awareness Center

Many women do not know that heart disease is the number one killer of women in the U.S.

The Karen Yontz Women’s Cardiac Awareness Center at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center is a nationally recognized resource center dedicated to decreasing the incidence and impact of heart disease in women.



In 2020, Karen Yontz Center team members employed by our hospital facilitated 60 in-person and virtual educational events for 2,412 attendees. Of those attendees who responded to a survey, 251 reported improvement in lifestyle practices and 25 reported adopting a stress-management practice based on what they learned during the event.

Additionally, in 2020:

- 60 individuals received health risk assessments and educational reinforcement
- 315 women identified a personal risk factor and behavioral change they were willing to make
- 331 clients completed a 30-day check-in following a one-on-one consultation or screening
- 2,000 community members stayed connected via the Center’s monthly heart health newsletter.

Through Karen Yontz Women’s Cardiac Awareness Center’s community-focused programming, Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center hopes to empower women with the information, resources and tools they need to make heart-healthy lifestyle decisions.

**Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, Milwaukee**

## Focusing on Breast Health

The Su Salud/Your Health program at Ascension St. Francis Hospital delivers culturally competent, bilingual educational presentations, comprehensive patient services, and breast cancer screenings to underserved women in Milwaukee. The program is part of the hospital’s commitment to removing barriers for women in the community to access breast health care.

Su Salud is an innovative initiative that served about 500 women last year in Milwaukee and thousands since 2004. The program makes it easier to access services for women traditionally underserved by the health care system – those who are vulnerable, uninsured, or have limited English language skills, with a focus on Hispanic women. The program seeks to create understanding, access and a compassionate support system for women who have traditionally been reluctant to engage in or otherwise excluded from life-saving breast cancer screenings.

Su Salud creates a support system for women and should a woman require follow-up screening or care, the Ascension St. Francis team provides financial coordination and navigation services to support her as she moves through the diagnostic and treatment services, including working to access health insurance, and financial and emotional resources. By providing life-saving outreach, education and screening programs, the program aims to detect and prevent breast cancer.



*Ascension St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee*

As breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among Latinas, Su Salud emphasizes preventive education and screening services. The Su Salud team finds Hispanic women with breast cancer typically present at an earlier age and with more advanced cancers. It is because of individualized education and screening programs such as Su Salud that women are able to have the prevention and detection resources they need.

**Ascension St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee**



Photo courtesy of Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital, Menomonee Falls

## Advancing EMS provider knowledge

Aurora Medical Center-Burlington is committed to supporting the training and development of EMS providers in Racine county. They are committed to not only ensure the best care possible for all individuals before arriving to a hospital, but also to encourage EMS providers to remain engaged in the industry.

Aurora Medical Center-Burlington facilitates EMS trainings multiple times per year in locations across their service area and often provides trainings necessary for EMS personnel to maintain their license. Their EMS medical director and other providers discuss a variety of topics such as new EMS protocols, medication administration, working with patients experiencing an altered mental status, stroke diabetic emergencies, and Narcan administration. Although outreach efforts were limited compared to years past due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 28 trainings were provided to EMS agencies with 495 participants. Additionally, 2,002 CEU's were granted.

Our hospital's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner also works with local emergency response providers and community members to educate their teams on abuse response and Trauma Informed Care. In 2020, 54 community education and prevention trainings were provided in person and virtually for 968 community members, including EMS providers.

By continuing to offer professional training, health professions education, and medical oversight for Emergency Responders, especially those in rural communities, our hospital hopes to improve pre-hospital care for community members and engage local EMS providers.

[Aurora Medical Center – Burlington](#)

## FIT in the Parks Health and Wellness Series Helps Address Community Health and Fitness Needs

In partnership with the Village of Menomonee Falls and as part of the Live Well Waukesha County initiative, the Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) health network is a proud sponsor of the FIT in the Parks health and wellness series. More than 25 free activities were offered in various parks throughout the village of Menomonee Falls, including family and adult boot camps, walking club, plein air painting, yoga, sunset candlelight hike and barre fitness mat classes. More than 700 community members participated last year. Froedtert & MCW health network staff offer education on healthy eating, hands-only CPR, stroke, bike safety, fall prevention and the effects of exercise on mental health, as well as blood pressure screenings, at the community activities. The 2018 Community Health Improvement Plan and Process (CHIPPP) Survey found that about 70% of adult residents of Waukesha County are overweight or obese, and less than half of those surveyed met recommended nutritional and physical activity goals. Froedtert & MCW's health network works to address these issues through community partnerships and programs such as FIT in the Parks.

[Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital, Menomonee Falls](#)

## A New Beginning for New Beginnings APFV

New Beginnings APFV's mission is to provide supportive services and advocacy for adult and child victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, and human trafficking. The organization also educates community members about these critical issues. They offer free support and advocacy to individuals and families in Walworth and Jefferson Counties.

“For several decades, Advocate Aurora Health has been committed to serving individuals whose lives have been affected by violence. Community safety and violence prevention continues to be a top priority within our community health strategy,” Aurora Lakeland Medical Center President Bob Miller said. Our hospital and our Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners have partnered with and referred patients to New Beginnings APFV for community-based support services for several years.

Unfortunately, New Beginnings APFV was running out of space.

In 2020, with support from community donors, New Beginnings APFV moved to a new location that was donated by our hospital to the organization.

“With its long history of serving the communities throughout Walworth County, Aurora Lakeland Medical Center is pleased and proud to donate our former clinic to New Beginnings,” Miller said. “We hope this gift to New Beginnings will serve as a beacon of hope to survivors and their families and ensure vital services are available in Walworth County for many years to come. We can’t think of a better use of our former clinic than in serving this shared purpose.”

New Beginnings moved to their new location in spring 2021.

[Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, Elkhorn](#)

## Partnering to Provide Flu Vaccinations

There are many reasons to get an influenza (flu) vaccine each year. The need for getting a flu vaccination was even more significant during the 2020-2021 flu season because of 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 2020, Aurora Medical Center-Summit partnered with Lake Area Free Clinic and the Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers-Waukesha Clinic to donate 250 flu vaccines for community members. This donation was made as part of Advocate Aurora Health’s system-level health equity mission and targeted communities in Waukesha County most heavily impacted by COVID-19, including uninsured individuals and Hispanic community members.

In addition to partnering on community flu vaccinations, we also worked with the Lake Area Free Clinic and Waukesha Free Clinic to ensure their staff and volunteers had access to the COVID-19 vaccine as part of the 1a health care designation workgroup. This allowed those clinics to provide added protection for their staff and volunteers while they continued caring for their patients during the pandemic.

[Aurora Medical Center – Summit](#)

## Active Parks Program Promotes Physical and Mental Wellness



In partnership with Port Washington Parks & Rec, West Bend Parks & Rec and Aurora Health Care, and as part of the Cultivate Mental Wellness initiative, the Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin health network sponsored the Active Parks wellness program. More than 200 community members participated in free classes, such as mindful meditation, Reiki, yoga, tai chi, aromatherapy and antibullying that were held in local parks. Froedtert West Bend Hospital staff taught the Reiki classes and offered mental health wellness educational materials.

Based on the 2018 Community Health Improvement Plan and Process Survey, about 67% of Washington County residents were classified as overweight and 18% reported having a mental health condition. Mental health conditions

are associated with chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, and related to risk behaviors for chronic disease and physical inactivity. Our health network works to address these issues through community partnerships and programs including Active Parks.

### Froedtert West Bend Hospital, West Bend

## Community Health Worker Passionate About Total Health and Wellness

The Community Health Worker program helps increase self-management in high-risk populations by addressing social determinants of health and expanding access to health resources to assist, support and navigate individuals to necessary community-based services and adequate insurance coverage.

**Meet Shantel Hendricks**

Shantel is a Community Health Worker at United Methodist Children's Services (UMCS) serving the Washington Park Neighborhood and surrounding areas. Her role is to connect people with resources in our community. She believes in the wellness of the TOTAL self: Mind, Body, and Spirit.

Shantel can help you:

- Identify and access medical or dental care
- Understand your medical bills
- Understand your insurance benefits
- Find food, clothing, & other resources for you & your family
- Organize community health & wellness events

United Methodist Children's Services  
3940 W. Lisbon Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53208  
414-344-1818  
shantel.hendricks@umcs-wi.org

UMCS  
Froedtert & MEDICAL COLLEGE OF WISCONSIN

Shantel Hendricks, the community health worker at United Methodist Children's Services, which is supported by Froedtert Hospital, is passionate about improving the overall health of residents in Milwaukee's Washington Park neighborhood. Shantel believes in total health and wellness and strives to support community members by guiding them to services for employment, finances, food, clothing, health insurance and transportation. She also works to reduce unnecessary health care costs and improve access to primary care by providing residents resources for primary care services, as well as behavioral health, dental and vision services.

Last year, Shantel coordinated several wellness workshops, a weekly walking group and a community garden. She also facilitated healthy food demonstrations to help dispel the belief that healthy eating doesn't taste good.

### Froedtert Hospital, Milwaukee

## Project Ujima Summer Camp Helps Kids Impacted by Violence Heal and Thrive

Launched in 1996 to care for patients and families who have experienced violence, Project Ujima works to stop the cycle of violent crimes through crisis intervention and case management, social and emotional support, youth development and mentoring, mental health, and medical services. Project Ujima provides crime victim advocates, nurses, mental health coordinators and therapists who help patients and their families process the trauma they've experienced, the feelings they're having and connect them with resources and supports they need. True healing begins when you try to connect with families about options and support in a way that's respectful and non-judgmental. In 2020, Project Ujima worked with families impacted by more than 200 homicides.

Project Ujima's Summer Camp is a six-week experience where kids come together in a safe and stable environment to develop relationships, build unity, self-esteem and heal. Melissa, a mom of three children who recently attended Project Ujima Summer Camp, shares: "For me it was a safe place that my children could go to with other kids who might be going through some of the same things. They met friends that they still talk to and are able to build new relationships. As a parent, I am very thankful for the program as it has been a shining star in some of the hard roads we have come across. I don't know what I would do without the team and what they have been able to help my family accomplish."

### Children's Wisconsin Hospital-Milwaukee

## Sharing Data with Payors to Help Reduce Readmission Rates

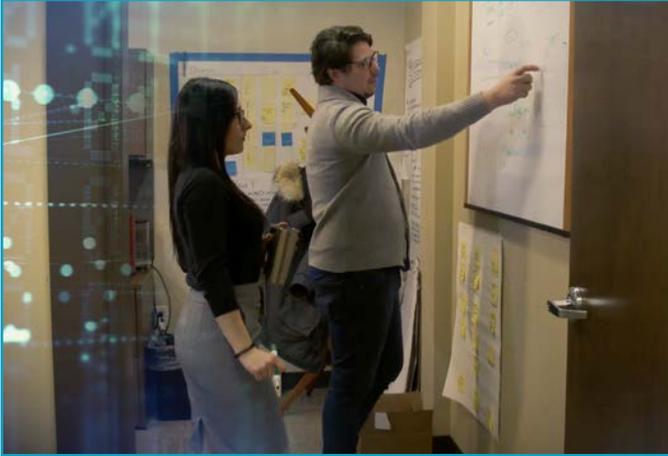
Rogers Behavioral Health is gaining more insight into the patient journey through a new data sharing initiative with payors.

While Rogers tracks inpatient readmission rates for its own hospitals, the organization had no way of knowing if patients readmit elsewhere within 30 days.

"The data sharing agreements are incredibly important partnerships, and are very unique in our field," said Brad Riemann, PhD, chief clinical officer. "We can combine what we know collectively to improve patient outcomes, and that's a powerful thing."

Preliminary results show that readmission rates overall continue to go down with the use of Rogers' standardized treatment for inpatient care and patient-reported outcome measures in addition to its emphasis on dose and continuation of the clinical pathway.

For example, according to one payor, of those patients who readmitted to treatment within 30 days at Rogers or elsewhere, 92% did not follow the clinical pathway from inpatient care to any lower level of care.



*Brian Kay, PhD, vice president of Continuous Improvement, and Jessica Cook, director of Clinical Effectiveness, are part of the team at Rogers working on the data sharing initiative.*

Furthermore, analyses show that completing the clinical pathway is crucial in helping reduce the likelihood of patients readmitting.

“Patients going from inpatient to partial hospitalization is important, but continuing inpatient to partial and then down to intensive outpatient care really seems to be helping patients not only make large improvements but also learn to sustain those gains for the long term,” said Jessica Cook, director of clinical effectiveness.

Based on these results, Rogers’ goal is to increase the percentage of patients who follow the clinical pathway from inpatient care to residential, partial hospitalization, or intensive outpatient care.

### **Rogers Behavioral Health, Oconomowoc**

# Southern Region

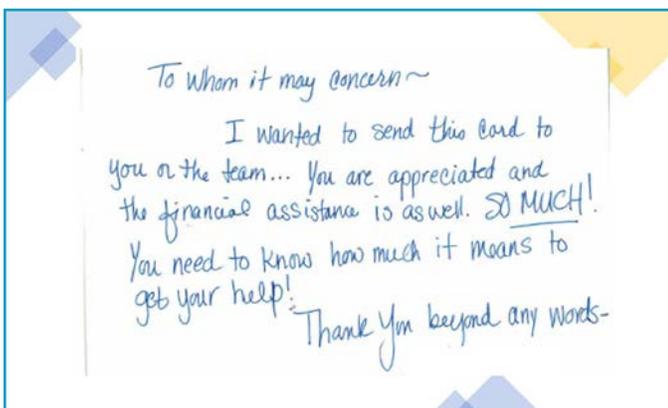


**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$339,864,425**

## Charity Care

### Removing Financial Stress

To help patients better focus on their health instead of financial situation, UW Health is proud to offer a financial assistance program to patients who are unable to pay for the care provided at UW Health. Patients work with dedicated staff members to apply for financial assistance to cover all or a portion of their bill. In FY20, UW Hospitals and Clinics' financial assistance program provided \$17.8 million of charity care at cost. This assistance comes as a major relief to these patients who have already gone through the stress of a medical problem. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need and financial hardship on patients.



A UW Health patient expresses their gratitude for receiving financial assistance

Recently a single mother of three shared her concern about the cost of an upcoming medical appointment. She was overwhelmed at the thought of paying her deductible and out-of-pocket cost and was considering cancelling the appointment. She was connected with a UW Health financial counselor who helped her apply for financial aid before the appointment. She was able to be pre-approved, setting her mind at ease knowing she could go to the appointment without incurring a large out-of-pocket expense.

Our grateful patients express the importance of this assistance best:

- *Thank you for approving me. You have me in tears. I am off all week again due to a lung infection (long haul COVID). I can't thank you enough."*
- *"I can't thank you and UWHC enough. Besides getting the best care possible, I have been helped so much financially. Thank you!"*

UW Health, Madison

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Fort HealthCare's COVID-19 Response and Resilience

Over the past year, Fort HealthCare and its communities have demonstrated a responsiveness like no other time in our history. Fort HealthCare had many key initiatives to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Working collaboratively with the Jefferson County Health Department and community partners, a COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center and Task Force was established. The virtual meetings were held frequently to discuss the best practices to manage our collaborative efforts during the pandemic.

Several of the immediate action items put into place are still happening today. Fort HealthCare was able to implement a drive-through COVID-19 testing process to keep patients and staff safe. They established a temporary walk-in clinic in Fort Atkinson to assist the community with non-COVID symptoms and concerns. They added a COVID-19 Triage phone line to provide information to the community and assist with contact tracing, and increased lab capacity and testing in the hospital. The addition of a more extensive video visit capability to their existing e+Care online service for primary, specialty, behavioral health, and rehab therapy service lines helped address the immediate patient needs. The community came together and donated over 2,000 masks and various items and they were able to distribute those to the community appropriately. COVID-19 vaccination clinics were established and up and running as quickly as possible to promote

vaccination as the number one line of defense. Employees utilized innovative and collaborative techniques to ensure continued focus on employee safety and Fort HealthCare's culture, while providing patient-centered care.



Fort HealthCare protecting our most vulnerable with vaccination clinics

Together they showed that they are responsive and a source of strength for our communities. These efforts continue today and will into the future.

Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson

## Meriter Provides COVID-19 Testing for Unhoused Community

UnityPoint Health-Meriter and Public Health Madison & Dane County (PHMDC) partnered to provide more than 1,600 COVID-19 tests at local homeless shelters in Madison in 2020.



Matt Julian, social worker, and Lauren Jerzak, RN, with Meriter's HEALTH program prepare for COVID testing at a Madison shelter.

"As the community hospital, our mission is to improve the health of the people and communities we serve, which includes our most vulnerable populations," said Sue Erickson, President and CEO of UnityPoint Health-Meriter. "We already partner closely with shelters through our HEALTH (Helping Educate and Link the Homeless) outreach program, so supporting COVID-19 testing was a natural fit."

Meriter coordinated staff and volunteers to perform the testing. PHMDC handled logistics, including a site lead, testing supplies, transport to the Exact Sciences lab for processing and follow-up calls.

Individuals who presented at shelters already underwent health screenings and those with symptoms were quarantined at a separate location. This testing focused on the general shelter population who may be asymptomatic and unknowingly spreading COVID-19. The goal was to identify asymptomatic individuals early and stop further spread. Shelter-based testing was especially important for individuals who didn't have access to reliable transportation to other community testing sites.

Testing took place at four shelters: The Salvation Army, The Beacon and two Porchlight locations – Safe Haven and the emergency men's shelter. Testing for shelter residents was offered on a rotating bi-weekly schedule and has continued into 2021.

UnityPoint Health – Meriter, Madison

## RAMC's Spiritual Care Coordinator Provides Helpful Resources during COVID-19

When the world first went into lockdown due to COVID-19, Reedsburg Area Medical Center's (RAMC) Tammy Koenecke knew instinctively that people would need help in dealing with the stress and anxiety they were feeling. Tammy, as the former spiritual care coordinator at RAMC, took it upon herself to script and record several videos that were shared with not only RAMC team members, but also with the public at large via the hospital's website and social media platforms.



Tammy Koenecke, Spiritual Care Coordinator at RAMC

In her usual gentle and caring manner, Tammy covered difficult topics such as anxiety, stress, and isolation. She offered meaningful ways to combat worry, fear, and depression with the use of breathing techniques, prayer, stillness, and being present in the moment. These videos were watched by thousands and shared around the world for several weeks during the early days of the pandemic. Tammy also offered 1:1 phone sessions for anyone who needed more personalized care. When members of the community were fearful and hurting, Tammy was insightful enough to realize what people needed, and caring enough to reach out to them.

Reedsburg Area Medical Center, Reedsburg

## Providing Leadership and Resources During COVID-19 Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic turned hospital systems upside down, and Stoughton Health was no exception. It altered many aspects of our lives from work, travel, education, exercise to seeking medical attention. The nature of the pandemic was unprecedented.



Stoughton Health celebrated providing 5,000 COVID-19 vaccines to the community. Pictured: Community Member Kelly Slamar

Stoughton Health took the lead in public education, sharing CDC-approved messaging through social media, television, billboards, video, radio and its website that encouraged masking, washing hands and social distancing. Within a few weeks, Stoughton Health began offering COVID-19 testing—providing fast results to help contain the virus as much as possible.

Stoughton Health initiated a task force of community leaders including the city government, the chamber of commerce, police department, school district, and Stoughton Health who met weekly in the midst of the pandemic. This joint task force collaborated in not only planning testing protocols, vaccinations, and safety restrictions, but also facilitated safe 2020 Presidential Election voting, back-to-school efforts, and discussions around sustaining economic development. The team continues to collaborate and meet monthly.

In January 2021, Stoughton Health began facilitating vaccination clinics in an effort to vaccinate as many people as possible. Tears of joy and relief were witnessed throughout the hospital halls. In April 2021, Stoughton Health recognized and celebrated the recipient of the 5,000th vaccine given. The work done by Stoughton Health over the past 17 months is a testament to their culture of selflessness, empathy, versatility and focus on strong community partnerships.

**Stoughton Health, Stoughton**

## Reaching Across the Aisle for Vaccinations

They are on opposite sides of the political aisle, but Wisconsinites heard from two former governors about a common goal: Get every eligible Wisconsinite vaccinated to help officially close the book on the COVID-19 pandemic.

In June of 2020, vaccination rates began to slow. To encourage all eligible Wisconsinites to get their vaccine, UW Health teamed up with former Governors Scott Walker, a Republican, and Jim Doyle, a Democrat, on a public service announcement.

In the PSA, Walker and Doyle are on a Zoom call remarking on how they found something they agree on: They want the pandemic to end and they want everyone in Wisconsin to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Both Walker and Doyle had gotten a COVID-19 vaccine. UW Health Chief Quality Officer Dr. Jeff Pothof joins the call at the end to encourage everyone to get their shot.

While the ad is lighthearted in its pitch to Wisconsinites, the governors shared some personal messages for the people of Wisconsin as well. “Tonette and I encourage all Wisconsinites to get vaccinated and enjoy a great Wisconsin summer again,” Walker said.

Doyle reminded Wisconsinites that “the vaccine represents our way out of this pandemic. I was proud to get my vaccine, and I hope everyone in Wisconsin gets theirs and enjoys some return to normal life.”



Governors Scott Walker and Jim Doyle team up with UW Health physician Jeff Pothof to promote COVID-19 vaccinations

“We are excited this PSA came together. It’s a good reminder that COVID-19 is not a political issue, and we really do have broad agreement,” Pothof said. “We want everyone to get the vaccine to keep themselves and the community safe so we can end this pandemic.”

**UW Health, Madison**

## Health Equity

### Initiating Community Conversations with Underserved Population

To better foster dialogue around racial disparities and health care, Monroe Clinic hosted a Meet & Greet event in July 2021 to initiate thoughtful community conversations. The Spanish-speaking event was held at a local middle school as an open discussion for Hispanic families to bring forward questions around health care. Moderating the discussion was Monroe Clinic Primary Care Nurse Practitioners, Diane Pineda, FNP-BC and Julio Delgado, FNP.



Ramon Viveros, Dean at Carl Sandberg School, and Monroe Clinic Nurse Practitioners Diane Pineda and Julio Delgado at Meet and Greet event.

Questions and comments at the event included vaccine information, the experience of scheduling and going to an appointment if you only speak Spanish, blood pressure and glucose screenings, and the request to hold meetings like this more often and in different locations. Participants feel that people are interested and will continue to come with their questions.

This opportunity was brought forward by Ramon Viveros, the middle school's dean, who shared that their Hispanic population needed more health care related information. As fluent Spanish speakers and already established providers to some Hispanic patients, Diane and Julio were excited to volunteer to lead these discussions.

Diane and Julio are committed to community health for this underserved population. This is just the beginning of Monroe Clinic's plans to address comments and concerns that were made at the event and help eliminate barriers for their health care needs. More Meet & Greet type of community events are being planned along with visits to churches and local employers.

[Monroe Clinic/SSM Health, Monroe](#)

### Education as a Path Out of the Criminal Justice System and to Improved Health

At SSM Health's St. Clare's Hospital-Baraboo, staff partnered with academic experts and county agencies to design and fund an educational training program for individuals engaged in Sauk County's criminal justice system. The intent was to create a pathway out of the criminal justice system and into employment which would result in improved access to health care and a better quality of life for the individuals and their families.

When designing the program, the partners knew that a significant percentage of incarcerated individuals lacked high school diplomas and the Sheriff's Department confirmed that many were seeking educational training and credentials. In late 2019, SSM Health formalized an agreement with the health department, created an Education Navigator position and transferred funds to start the project. A Navigator with a background in alternative adult education was hired in January 2020.

In the project's first 18 months, the Navigator provided services, training and incentives in over 150 sessions. By July of 2021, individuals had passed 27 modules and the program graduated its first student with a General Education Development (GED) degree. Of the program, one participant wrote, "The Sauk County GED Program has helped me improve my mood for better and have a positive impact on my home life. Being in the program has changed my goals in a good way. I do think it is important to continue the program because it benefits a lot of people who otherwise couldn't obtain their GED."

[SSM Health St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo](#)

### Hospital Partners with Local Farmers' Markets to Increase Food Security

SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital-Janesville is committed to ensuring Rock County community members have access to affordable, high-quality healthy foods.

Each year, SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital-Janesville is proud to partner with the Janesville Farmers' Market. Hospital staff members enjoy providing healthy snacks, recipes and education at the market on Saturdays throughout the summer.

In an effort to address food insecurity and also to improve health equity in Rock County, SSM Health teamed up with the Janesville Farmers' Market and also the Downtown Beloit Association Farmers' Market to start a new and exciting offering in 2021.

Stataline Area community members who utilize Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at the Janesville Farmers' Market were able to receive bonus "produce tokens" throughout the summer. In Beloit, a pilot program was started where SNAP users were gifted \$10 in additional market tokens each month thanks to SSM Health.



SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital Staff providing education at the Janesville Farmers' Market.

In both Janesville and Beloit, the SNAP market tokens are used to purchase fresh produce and items like honey, cheese or bread to nourish their families and support the local farming community.

Through the funding, there was opportunity for more than 500 families to be helped through the initiative. We hope this program helps families have more access to healthy, quality foods they need and that it encourages them to try a new item that is on their wish list.

SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital-Janesville continues to support efforts which address Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), such as food insecurity, to help improve health equity in our communities.

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

## St. Mary's Participation in the Dane County Health Council

SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital-Madison is proud to be an active participant and key partner in the Dane County Health Council's (DCHC's) efforts to address racial maternal and child health (MCH) inequities. Statistics have revealed that Wisconsin has the nation's worst record for black infant mortality. In addition, maternal mortality for Black mothers is five times higher than for White mothers.

The DCHC has the long-term goal of eliminating the Black-White racial inequities in low birthweight births and infant mortality. The Council also seeks to eliminate the health, educational and economic outcomes inequities for Black women and children. To do this, the Council is pursuing strategies and activities to expand continuous Black family engagement and leadership, create a system of universal risk screening of social determinants of health, improve community resource coordination through a closed-loop referral system, and address Care Team workforce diversity.

A key DCHC activity involves development of the Connect Rx care coordination program. Connect Rx intends to provide more culturally responsive care and address Black MCH inequities, automatically identify high-risk pregnant patients and alert clinicians, and address patients' unmet social needs. These efforts are combined with the Council's Saving Our Babies community engagement efforts. Through Saving Our Babies and leadership provided by the Foundation for Black Women's Wellness and EQT by Design, the Council hosted a Black Maternal and Child Health Summit. Saving Our Babies is also creating and launching a Black MCH website and is supporting a Black Maternal-Child Health Alliance.

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

## UW Health Prioritizes Equitable Vaccine Distribution

UW Health centered equity when developing processes to distribute COVID-19 vaccinations. As the vaccine became available in December but supply was scarce, UW Health created an algorithm to ensure equitable distribution of the vaccine among frontline employees. The formula incorporated employees' job-related risk, age, and Social Vulnerability Index (SVI).

As vaccine supplies improved in the spring, UW Health 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.

Dane County had lower rates of vaccination amongst Black, Latinx and Asian communities. Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, UW Health vice president and chief diversity officer, said, "Given the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on our communities of color, it is vitally important to ensure racial equity in vaccination. At UW Health we stand committed to address these disparities through our vaccine racial equity initiative by creating dedicated access and removing barriers such as language and transportation."



*UW Health respiratory therapist became the first of UW Health's health care heroes to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.*

Through the Latino Chamber of Commerce, Latinx-owned businesses including restaurants and markets were able to vaccinate their owners and employees. "Our partnership with UW Health is invaluable during this vaccination process," said Jessica Cavazos, chief executive officer of the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce. "Our Latinx-owned businesses have been essential in serving the needs of the community during the pandemic and creating access to vaccines is a moral imperative."

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 continues to provide culturally and linguistically relevant information about COVID-19 vaccines to ensure their communities of color have access to reliable information and feel empowered to make informed decisions related to vaccination.

**UW Health, Madison**

## *Hospital-supported Initiatives*

### **Sensory-Friendly Initiatives Implemented**

Gundersen Boscobel Area Hospital and Clinics implemented a sensory-friendly initiative in 2020. With the help of partner organizations, this work has expanded to include all facets of care. The impact on patients (and families) is great.

Working with Aiming for Acceptance (A4A) and UW-Madison Hospital's Waisman Center, Gundersen Boscobel completed an organizational assessment to identify ways to provide optimal care for patients with various sensory processing needs. Project collaborators then developed guidelines and adaptations supporting a more sensory-friendly environment. Modifications were made and a menu/toolboxes with sensory aids were developed.

According to the Waisman Center, Gundersen Boscobel's program is the first of its kind. Gundersen Boscobel has a newfound perspective, discovered gaps between urban/rural health care and staff knowledge of the care environment, and made modifications to better support patients with ASD, mental health needs and developmental delays.

Gundersen Boscobel's dedicated team is excited to be one of the first critical access hospitals in Wisconsin to accept this challenge. By offering something as simple as a squishy ball or fidget spinner, an oral stimulator, earmuffs or even sunglasses, they're thinking outside the traditional health care box.



*RN Jodie Napp reassures a young patient*

Gundersen Boscobel knows their care environment and the way our team interacts, assesses and treats patients with sensory needs is not "one size fits all." While standard clinical practices and protocols remain, staff are now equipped with new knowledge and tools to help reduce the level of patient anxiety, unrest or over-stimulation. The result is optimal care delivery: working to make the health care environment and treatment as tolerable as possible.

**Gundersen Boscobel Area Hospital and Clinics, Boscobel**

## Fort HealthCare's Community Behavioral Health Initiatives

With mental/behavioral Health being a top priority from their recent Community Health Needs Assessment, Fort HealthCare has been involved with several initiatives that support behavioral health in Jefferson County.

A Behavioral Health Subcommittee was established in 2020 including Jefferson County stakeholders through the Rock River Health Care Network. This subcommittee was formed to evaluate the current need of behavioral health services in the community. The new network completed a survey of area behavioral health provider services currently provided. Gaps were identified and a strategic plan involving the referral-contract-employ model was adopted. More specifically, it was decided to implement a Care Navigator Model as a pilot at the Rock River Community Clinic (RRCC) as a first step. These staff will work directly with patients (referred from the providers) to assist them with their needs outside of the medical appointment. They will become intimately aware of the referral patterns and data will be kept determining successful behavioral health community referrals. This data will better inform the Network if behavioral health community capacity is indeed accurate.

Fort HealthCare is also providing behavioral health services that are co-located within primary care settings. This co-location integrated model offers several benefits: increased direct referrals from primary care to behavioral health; increased collaboration and coordination of care in treating patients holistically; available and needed resources to manage and resolve mental health crises that present within the primary care clinics; and increased consultation between primary care and behavioral health. Integrated Care is an initiative Fort HealthCare knows promotes best practices and improved patient outcomes that they remain committed to. Fort HealthCare's primary care clinics are screening patients at every visit for depression and suicide risk using the PHQ-9 for adults 18+ and a PHQ-A for patients 11-17 years old. As of May 31, 2021, 45% of Fort HealthCare's eligible patient population for this screening were assessed using one of the depression screening tools. Being a new policy, the focus is currently on education and training for clinic staff.

Fort HealthCare continues with The School-Based Behavioral Health Program. Each school year, Fort HealthCare has successfully increased the behavioral health presence in schools recognizing the significant need of students, and prioritizing funding to make these services available. They are currently working with three public school districts and two parochial schools, providing services in 12 school buildings.

**Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson**

## Offering a Safe Haven for Babies



*Safe Haven decals placed at 13 entrances across all of Monroe Clinic's locations.*

After a local newborn tragically lost her life, Carol Stabenow, RN, Monroe Clinic Emergency Department manager, recognized a community education opportunity.

As a 'Safe Haven' partner, Monroe Clinic provides a safe environment for parents to relinquish their child at any of their locations. A parent has the right to leave their baby within 72 hours

of birth at any medical facility, fire station, police station, emergency medical services providers or any other law enforcement agency while staff are present with no questions asked.

"There are many circumstances that may accompany an unexpected pregnancy – financial distress, shame, fear – and those circumstances can cause people to take desperate measures they never would have anticipated," shared Carol. "Having Safe Haven as an option to place a child anonymously can prevent a tragedy that impacts the infant and the parent."

The first step to growing the awareness of Monroe Clinic's Safe Haven abilities was to start internally. Carol worked with her team members and hospital leadership to update their policy. She then provided staff education through manager trainings and internal news stories, as well as had Safe Haven decals placed at 13 entrances across all of Monroe Clinic's locations.

Phase two is extending the awareness out into Monroe Clinic's communities. This is being accomplished through the sharing of Safe Haven information with appropriate community organizations, partners and school districts. Posters in both English and Spanish with information have been provided to those groups and are also displayed in public areas at Monroe Clinic.

"With this education, we want to be here for the community to feel comfortable in knowing there are safe options," she explained.

**Monroe Clinic/SSM Health, Monroe**

## Partners Help Feed People in Need in Dodge County

Marshfield Medical Center (MMC)-Beaver Dam, in partnership with other southern Wisconsin and Dodge County organizations, has been helping people in need especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



*People working at food distribution site*

MMC-Beaver Dam, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin and the U.S. Department of Agriculture as well as local organizations hosted six Truck to Trunk Food Drives between September 2020 and February 2021 as part of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program. The free events were open to all Dodge County residents and were staged in a drive-through format at the Dodge County Fairgrounds. In total, more than 150,000 pounds of food were given to those impacted by food insecurity.

Boxes included a variety of fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy items supplied by Midwestern farms and purchased by the Department of Agriculture to help ensure food did not go to waste and could be used to help families in need.

Each event included volunteers from across Dodge County, along with several MMC-Beaver Dam employees, who helped with box delivery, traffic control and loading boxes into vehicles. MMC-Beaver Dam staff coordinated and participate in these events on paid time. Multiple safety precautions were taken to reduce the level of COVID-19 exposure to staff, volunteers and residents.

Organizations, like Beaver Dam Public Transit, helped by getting boxes to people who did not have transportation and MMC-Beaver Dam provided mileage reimbursement for employees who made additional deliveries. Other participating organizations included area schools; Johnson Bus; K&B Lawn Care; Dodge County Sheriff's Department; United Way of Dodge County; Luedtke Lumber; and WDS Construction.

### Marshfield Medical Center - Beaver Dam

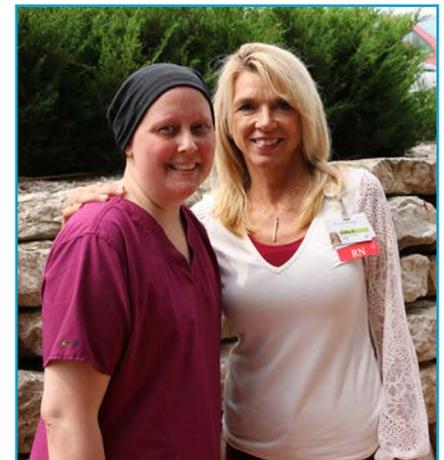
## Convenience, Guidance, And Support Offered to Increase Access

With only 66.3% of women aged 67-69 (39% age 65-74) receiving annual mammograms in Columbia County (according to a 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment), Prairie Ridge Health has made strides to increase the number of women receiving mammograms by improving access, providing advocacy, and encouraging women to continue to receive annual mammograms.

“Walk-In Wednesdays,” a screening mammogram program at Prairie Ridge Health, allows patients to walk in and receive a screening mammogram on specified Wednesdays during a 6–8-week period without a scheduled appointment.

In 2019, the walk-in program attracted 114 participants, with 32 (28%) of them being new mammogram patients. In 2020, the walk-in program attracted 94 participants with 24 (25.5%) of them being new mammogram patients, as compared to 2017 and 2018 when the walk-in program was first launched with only 3% of mammogram patients being new to the screening.

The breast health and cancer navigation nurse specialist at Prairie Ridge Health is the point person for the walk-in program, checking in the patients at arrival, calling with results following the screening, and providing the support needed to navigate them to the next point of care if additional views or further referrals for care are needed.



*Cathy Bolan, RNC, ONN-CG; ONC, Cancer Nurse Navigator/Breast Health Specialist at Prairie Ridge Health in Columbus continues to provide support throughout the pandemic to patients such as Angie Stuelke*

“It’s rewarding when you can see someone who at the beginning will be very vulnerable and very shocked and distressed, and you’re able to be with them as they move through their treatment. Hopefully, at the end, they come out more resilient and you’ve supported them through what’s been a very difficult time in their life,” said Cathy Bolan, RNC, ONN-CG; ONC, cancer nurse navigator/breast health specialist at Prairie Ridge Health in Columbus.

Bolan also serves as a support person for patients, assisting them in connecting with virtual support groups and providing follow up to keep mammograms and screenings on track.

“People all have very different needs, so you need to be able to tailor the support that you provide to your patients and their families to help them achieve the best possible outcomes,” added Bolan.

**Prairie Ridge Health, Columbus**

## Farmers Market Encourages Healthy Eating While Supporting the Community

Every Friday from May to October, Reedsburg Area Medical Center (RAMC) coordinates and hosts a farmers market that is open to the public. Vendors come from communities throughout Sauk County and beyond, providing a spectrum of fruits and vegetables at the peak of freshness. The farmers market is an asset to everyone involved: local residents and visitors find seasonal farm fresh produce - organic and non-GMO - at a reasonable cost. Local farmers are financially supported, which allows them to continue to operate and support their families. Even local schoolchildren come to sell the produce grown in their school’s community garden!



*Students from Pineview Elementary School sell their own locally grown produce at RAMC's Farmers Market*

And we didn't let COVID stop us! The pandemic underscored a renewed value in home cooking, food preservation, and a desire to shop in the safety of an open-air market. The blending of improved nutrition, economic stimulation, and educational opportunity is one way RAMC is proud to give back to the Reedsburg Area community.

**Reedsburg Area Medical Center, Reedsburg**

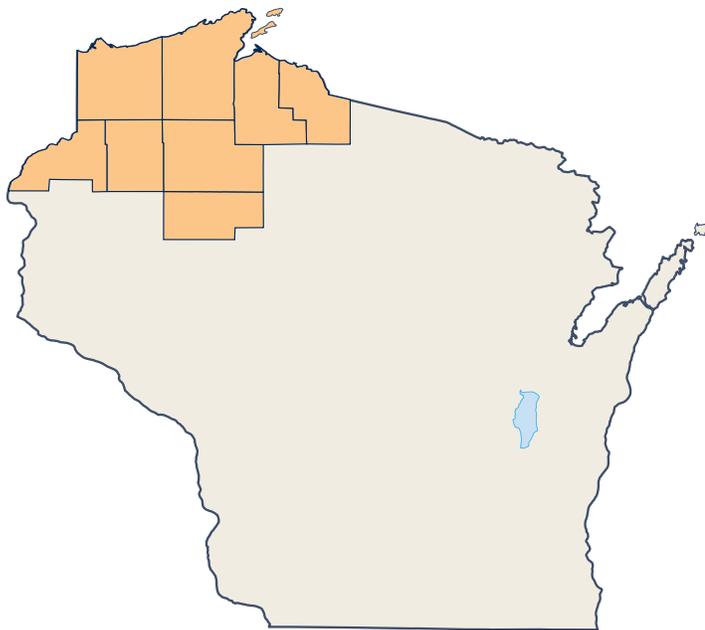
## Connecting Patients to Needed Resources

Decreased access to stable housing, healthy foods and social connections increases the likelihood of becoming sick, and hospital readmissions, among other health outcomes. UW Health has an aspirational goal to ensure that all patients will be screened for social determinants of health (SDOH) and receive appropriate follow-up in a patient-centered, trauma-informed and culturally responsive manner. UW Health has embarked on a multi-year initiative to standardize the use of SDOH screening and resource referral. They are ensuring that in addition to standardized screening and use of electronic medical record tools, there is the capacity to respond with community resources and care team supports.

This year, as a part of UW Health's partnership with the Dane County Health Council to address disparities in Black low birthweight and infant mortality, they will be participating in the development of a county-wide care coordination system utilizing tools within the electronic medical record to have two-way communication with community-based organizations for our pregnant patients. This project, ConnectRx, is part of their community health needs assessment priorities to address disparities in Black low birthweight and infant mortality. Project planning is underway to launch this initiative for pregnant patients by the end of 2021.

**UW Health, Madison**

# Vikingland Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$26,005,727**

## Charity Care

### Helping Through Difficult Times

Mary's life changed suddenly when she went for a routine mammogram and three tumors were discovered. Mary had a mastectomy scheduled within two weeks of receiving her diagnosis. At that time, Mary had Medicare, but due to the cost she did not have supplemental insurance.

When Mary received her portion of the bill, not covered by insurance, for \$8,500 she immediately set up a payment plan and began making monthly payments to the hospital. But it seemed that every time Mary got her bill paid down, something would happen to drive it back up.

A friend encouraged her to fill out the financial aid paperwork to find out if there were options available for her. Mary contacted the hospital and completed the paperwork, a process which Mary described as, "A lot of information, but all easy to obtain."

Mary could hardly believe when she received the letter, stating that her bill was forgiven, 100%.

"Our Financial Assistance Program helps low-income and uninsured patients with temporary financial assistance or free care for medical services they received at our facility," says Glynis Evans, patient financial services director. "It truly helps them through a difficult time without the worry of how they will pay for health care costs."



Mary takes great pride in being able to financially take care of herself and asking for help was not something she wanted to do. She is so grateful to the Patient Financial Services team, specifically Shelby, who never treated her differently for needing assistance.

[Hayward Area Memorial Hospital & Water's Edge, Hayward](#)

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Administering Thousands of COVID-19 Vaccines

Burnett Medical Center (BMC) is a 501(c)(3) critical access hospital and is the only hospital located in Burnett County, WI. Since the pandemic, they have installed an additional five negative pressure rooms in the inpatient unit and emergency department, installed ionization technology to provide continuous surface and air disinfection throughout the facility and installed a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for the laboratory to accelerate and more accurately diagnose patients with or without COVID-19.

However, BMC's greatest accomplishment thus far is being able to administer COVID-19 vaccines to our community members. On Dec. 17, 2020, BMC received its first supply of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. It was delivered for distribution to frontline health care workers and to BMC's Continuing Care Center residents. Those doses were all administered to the hospital staff and Continuing Care Center residents within 48 hours.

On Feb. 3, 2021, the first group of eligible community members were vaccinated in the waiting room of BMC's clinic. A rapid response committee created a streamlined process for BMC to safely administer hundreds of doses a day from the convenience of the clinic waiting room. Once the volume of patients decreased enough, the mass vaccination clinic was no longer needed, and patients are now able to

get vaccinated in the clinic through BMC's new COVID Clinic service.



Eligible community members waiting to receive their COVID-19 vaccine.

As of today, thousands of doses have been administered due to BMC's efforts. This is one way BMC is trying to stop the spread.

### Burnett Medical Center, Grantsburg

## Getting Rural Wisconsin Vaccinated

A small, rural Northern Wisconsin health care system and members of its community were waiting with bated breath along with the rest of the world for the COVID-19 vaccine to become available at the beginning of 2021. Finally, Memorial Medical Center's (MMC's) frontline staff and employees in the most danger of exposure who wanted the shot were vaccinated along with those 65 and older who became eligible.



MMC marketing department asked vaccination clinic attendees to share their reasons for getting the vaccine.

As the local health and human services department began to get weekly allotments of the vaccine, it became evident that MMC, as a leading voice in health care in the region, would be called upon to assist local health departments in distributing the shots. Counties in the area had thousands of people on wait lists, and not enough resources to deliver the vaccine.

MMC was honored to step forward and collaborate with the county and several other local agencies to provide weekly COVID-19 vaccine clinics to the community from the end of January through March of 2021. MMC nurses and providers volunteered their time to set up, coordinate and administer the vaccine. Retirees from MMC signed up and stayed at the clinics all day to register patients, answer questions and provide education.

Employees from multiple departments went above and beyond their formal job descriptions to assist with the efforts. MMC marketing and communications team members personally called individuals to set up vaccine appointments. MMC recruited the help of their Lean Coordinator to develop the best flow and process possible for vaccine clinic operations.

Liz Szot, Ashland County Health Officer said, "Because of the coordinated vaccination efforts, we were able to get more people vaccinated at a faster rate than we had expected. We have received extensive positive feedback and appreciation in regards to the way the clinics were run. This is a result of everyone's hard work and dedication to keeping the people in our communities healthy!"

MMC is proud to say that it assisted in vaccinating up to 600 people each week depending on the number of doses received from the state. They continued to campaign around the importance of getting vaccinated as it opened up to anyone ages 16+ in May. Now, as it is even more widely available in the United States, MMC remains a leading voice in its area with a message for everyone 12 years of age or older who is eligible to: "Get the COVID-19 Vaccine – it's Worth the Shot."

### Memorial Medical Center, Ashland

## Health Equity

### Essentia Health expands Groceries to Go program

Essentia Health is continuing its commitment to serving our communities by expanding a program called Groceries to Go. The program began several years ago with Age Well Arrowhead, which assists the area's older adult population. With the help of a grant from Essentia, Age Well Arrowhead

and North Country Independent Living were able to partner and expand the program to Douglas County. North Country Independent Living is a non-profit serving people with disabilities in Northwestern Wisconsin.



Essentia Health's Groceries to Go Program

Groceries to Go connects people with disabilities and older adults to groceries, cleaning products and personal hygiene items. The idea is to increase access to essential items and help individuals maintain their health and wellness. Participants in the program complete a shopping list, then a volunteer does the shopping, delivers the items, unpacks them and opens any products that might be difficult to open. The volunteers then do a touch-base concerning the needs of the individual and connect them to appropriate resources.

“Just knowing that you’re going to have that check-in and support is key for people to not feel alone and isolated, especially during the pandemic,” said Amanda Casady, community health specialist at Essentia.

As much as possible, Casady adds, the volunteer will be the same for each person so they can build critical connections that help foster positive relationships. The program is funded for one year, or until grant money runs out. The grant covers the cost of delivery services and administrative costs.

**Essentia Health, Superior**

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### Task Force Focuses on Recovery in Rusk County

A year ago, Marshfield Clinic Health System asked a diverse group of Rusk County agencies what the focus should be for addressing substance use in the community. The overwhelming answer was: ‘Recovery.’

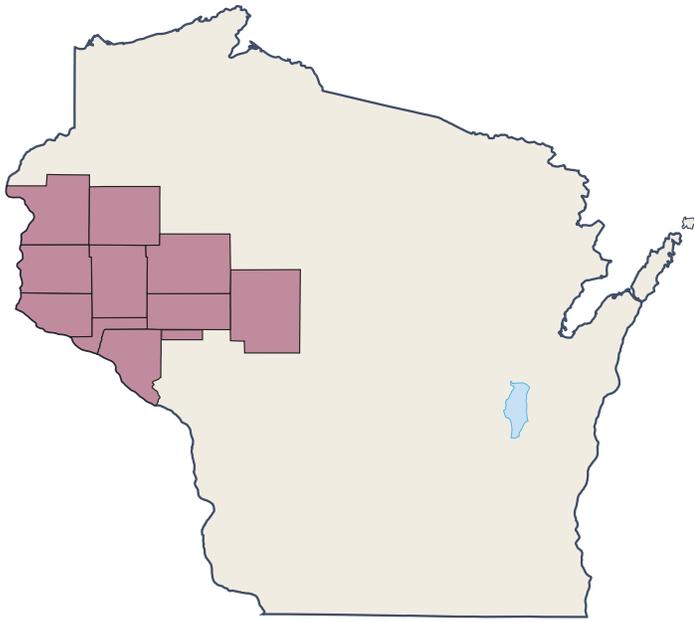
Substance misuse was identified as a primary community health issue in the 2019 Rusk County Community Needs Assessment survey. Nearly 80% of survey participants classified substance use as a “major problem” and 40% claimed, “people are not aware of the resources to stop or prevent substance use.”

To address these concerns, a group of 21 individuals representing 13 different agencies was convened to establish the foundation of a Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC) model. The evidence-based model focuses on long-term outcomes and linking initial treatment and active and ongoing care management. On behalf of this group of key stakeholders, Marshfield Medical Center-Ladysmith applied for and was awarded a Substance Use Disorder Grant from the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health. With the hospital serving as the backbone organization and the additional grant support, the newly named Rusk County Recovery Task Force began developing a roadmap for putting the model to work locally.

In their first year of existence, the Task Force has already achieved early success with the compilation, publication and distribution of the Rusk County Resource Guide for Substance Use and Mental Health. For years, the need for all-encompassing guide of prevention, intervention, treatment and post-treatment resources had been discussed, but was not possible until the large-scale collaboration provided by the Task Force. The guide is used to educate Rusk County residents on the resources available to address and improve mental health and substance use issues. With this knowledge, community members can improve their own health and contribute to the overall health of the community.

**Marshfield Medical Center, Ladysmith**

# West Central Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:**  
**\$63,523,851**

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Transcending COVID-19 Vaccine Administration

Though a pandemic wasn't on anyone's bucket list, we have all found ourselves right in the middle of one. The Cumberland Healthcare team rose to every changing recommendation, guideline or law as it presented. The COVID-19 vaccination is no different. Cumberland Healthcare quickly and efficiently coordinated a team committed to vaccinating its community members. They had the vaccine on hand in the first round (mid-December) and focused their efforts on its health care team members and medical first responders. Efforts extended to health care providers from organizations and community members as far as Eau Claire. This continued through all stages of vaccine release, often vaccinating 275+ people a day, four days a week for months. Cumberland Healthcare's team remained committed to last-minute scheduling changes and fielded thousands of calls, all during vaccine shortages.

At this time, Cumberland Healthcare has vaccinated over 4,500 individuals 12 years and up and administered near 10,000 doses. Its vaccination efforts remain active today, including third-dose vaccines for the immunocompromised community members. Throughout all disciplines, team

members ask and assist all patients in obtaining vaccination when they choose. In addition, Cumberland Healthcare regularly released educational and informational topics regarding vaccination and COVID-19 through social media and newsprint. As a result, their patients enjoy the benefit of having their questions answered promptly and professionally regarding all things COVID with a simple call.



*Dr. Alan Carlson, Family Medicine Physician receives first Covid-19 vaccine at Cumberland Healthcare December 2020*

Vaccination is the pivotal point to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. Cumberland Healthcare's efforts are fully supported by its health care providers, administration, all team members, public health, and most importantly, their community.

**Cumberland Healthcare, Cumberland**

### Monoclonal Antibodies Treatment

St. Croix Regional Medical Center was one of the few medical centers in the area that offered monoclonal antibodies treatment for COVID-19. The FDA authorized the use of monoclonal antibodies that are given by IV infusion. These antibodies can attach to parts of the coronavirus and can help the immune system recognize and respond more effectively to the virus.

Once this treatment was authorized, St. Croix Regional Medical Center quickly gathered a team together to develop the process and ensure we had the necessary supplies to help its patients. Within weeks they had created a separate, negative air-controlled space to deliver this necessary treatment to patients who qualified.

**St. Croix Regional Medical Center, St. Croix Falls**

## Dunn County, University of Wisconsin-Stout Vaccine Clinic Partnership

As COVID-19 vaccine supply increased in the spring and more individuals became eligible to receive their vaccinations, Mayo Clinic Health System in Menomonie worked quickly to partner with UW-Stout, a local university, to offer on-site vaccine clinics on UW-Stout's campus in Menomonie.



Registration staff from Mayo Clinic Health System set up at student vaccination pop-up clinic

With the support of Dunn County Public Health, UW-Stout employees were able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine through Mayo Clinic Health System and a partnership with the Medicine Shoppe, a local pharmacy. On March 9, 255 university employees received the first dose of the vaccine at an on-site pop-up clinic.

On April 16, 520 university students and employees were vaccinated. Mayo Clinic Health System staff including registration, scheduling, pharmacy, nursing, administration, and other support staff assisted in the effort. In May 2021, 210 community members were vaccinated. Those individuals receiving their first dose were then able to register for their second dose before leaving the building.

"We are grateful to our local public health department for their support with this opportunity. Thank you to Mayo Clinic Health System for serving as our partner in providing our employees with the opportunity to help reduce the spread of COVID-19," said Sandy Scott, Dean of Students, UW-Stout.

"Mayo Clinic Health System is proud to serve eligible UW-Stout employees with the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine is a vital tool to bring us closer to the end of this pandemic," said Dr. Paul Horvath, physician site lead at Mayo Clinic Red Cedar in Menomonie.

[Mayo Clinic Health System Red Cedar, Menomonie](#)

## Leading Vaccination Efforts

Western Wisconsin Health recognized the importance of the COVID-19 vaccine right away. They worked closely with the surrounding counties to offer weekly vaccine clinics, provide education, and answer any questions and concerns from both staff and the community. The Western Wisconsin Health team allowed any Wisconsin community member who was eligible to get the vaccine in their vaccine clinics from the beginning—rather than limiting it to only their patients on record. They were also very proactive about contacting businesses as their employees became eligible and getting them scheduled for vaccine clinics.



Mascot Health Hank taking his COVID-19 vaccine like a champ!

The community health team also wanted to make sure they reached all eligible populations and connected with local farms to coordinate vaccine clinic appointments for their Spanish speaking employees along with a Spanish interpreter. Western Wisconsin Health also provided vaccinations at some local businesses as well as soon as we had an off-site license. The team had an interpreter available and even brought one onsite for one business who had Spanish-speaking employees to make sure these employees had the opportunity to receive the vaccine and of course provide informed consent.

Western Wisconsin Health made all these efforts without charging a dime. It was a considerable undertaking to coordinate but was all worth it to make this valuable resource available to our community and our region.

[Western Wisconsin Health, Baldwin](#)

## Hospital-supported Initiatives

### Behavioral Health Enhancements are Transformational for Patients

Mental health was identified as the top priority in Amery Hospital & Clinic's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) with Polk County and other community partners.

Amery Hospital & Clinic is home to the region's only inpatient behavioral health program, so has a vital role to play in meeting the community's mental health needs.

In 2021, Amery Hospital & Clinic embarked on a project to improve the physical space in its inpatient Behavioral Health unit. The construction:

- Creates a more healing space – including a secure, outside patio area – for adults experiencing mental health crisis;
- Enables Amery Hospital & Clinic to better support the mental health needs of the region by offering a private room for every inpatient;
- Updates all spaces according to best practices to create a safe, comfortable environment that enhances healing.

The new, secure outdoor patio space has not been open long, but it is already having a transformational impact on patients – and the positive effects on mental health of being outdoors are well-documented. Upon experiencing the outdoor space, one of the first patients looked up at the sky, closed her eyes in the sun, and said, "This is just what I needed."

Additionally, Amery Hospital & Clinic continues to be a founding partner in the eight-hospital St. Croix Valley / Western Wisconsin collaboration, supporting a pioneering Emergency Department Behavioral Health Televideo Program to assess and refer patients arriving at the emergency department experiencing mental health crisis.

[Amery Hospital & Clinic – HealthPartners, Amery](#)

### Expanding Access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Treatment to Meet Our Community's Needs

Mental health and substance use were identified as the top two priorities in Westfields Hospital & Clinic's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) with St. Croix and Pierce counties and three other hospitals.

As a critical access hospital, Westfields Hospital & Clinic is an essential resource for its rural community's behavioral health needs.

In 2021, Westfields developed a plan to:

- Expand access to its Programs for Change for alcohol and substance abuse treatment and add a new suboxone support model to address opioid dependence, the first and only one of its kind in the region
- Expand access to psychiatric medical staff
- Grow its Growing Through Grief school program

Westfields Hospital & Clinic is achieving this with further investment to grow existing programs and FTEs, as well as construction to create a new, purpose-designed space for optimal behavioral health patient care.

Additionally, Westfields Hospital & Clinic continues to be a founding partner in the eight-hospital St. Croix Valley / Western Wisconsin collaboration, supporting a pioneering Emergency Department Behavioral Health Televideo Program to assess and refer patients arriving at the emergency department experiencing mental health crisis.

Just a few patient comments about this program include:

- "Everyone was amazing and made my family feel our problem was important and we were in the right spot for help. I am so grateful."
- "They treated us with so much respect."
- "They were the most welcoming, caring group I could ever imagine."

[Westfields Hospital & Clinic – HealthPartners, New Richmond](#)

### Pioneering a New Way to Treat Patients in Mental Health Crisis in Rural Communities

Mental health and substance use were identified as the top two priorities in Hudson Hospital & Clinic's most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) with St. Croix and Pierce counties.

Hudson Hospital & Clinic's proximity to the Twin Cities and the rural area it serves as a critical access hospital give it a unique opportunity to meet the community's behavioral health needs.

Hudson Hospital & Clinic continues to pioneer the Emergency Department Behavioral Health Televideo Program that serves eight hospitals and three counties in an innovative public-private partnership.



In 2019, Gov. Tony Evers visited to learn about the early stages of the pioneering Emergency Department Behavioral Health Televideo Program.

The program addresses the gap often found in the emergency departments of rural and community hospitals, where there may be little or no behavioral health resources to stabilize, assess, intervene, refer or consult. The program is based at Hudson Hospital & Clinic and provides two distinct services at the same time:

- Assess, diagnose, make treatment recommendations, assist with discharge recommendations, and help coordinate follow-up services; and,
- Complete crisis assessments and when needed, facilitate involuntary placements.

Additionally, Programs for Change at Hudson Hospital & Clinic was – and remains – one of the first alcohol and substance abuse treatment programs in the region to return to in-person group therapy sessions after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients continue to express their appreciation that we offer this option, which they find extremely valuable.



Peter VanDusartz, Director of Behavioral Health Programs for the HealthPartners St. Croix Valley hospitals, explained the innovative Behavioral Health Televideo during a visit by Gov. Tony Evers in 2019.

Programs for Change Hudson also recently expanded access by launching a psychiatric residency one-month rotation program. This equates to a full-time psychiatrist available at all times, and exposes psychiatric residents to the unique needs of the rural community being met by the program.

**Hudson Hospital & Clinic – HealthPartners, Hudson**

**Pandemic Habits: Has My Risk of Cancer Increased?**

In 2020, HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital, like many hospitals across the nation, saw a decrease in the number of patients receiving colorectal cancer screenings. The COVID-19 pandemic changed our daily lives in a variety of ways and as a result, many of us developed unhealthy habits to cope with these changes. These issues presented an opportunity and thus, *Pandemic Habits: Has My Risk of Cancer Increased?* was created.

The virtual panel event held on May 18, 2021, featured four HSHS health care professionals providing tangible takeaways to improve lifestyles while reducing risks for cancer. First, a clinical dietician and an occupational therapist spoke about how the habits formed during the pandemic may increase a person’s risk for colon cancer and how to develop new habits. A mental health counselor discussed the importance of reducing anxiety to aid in lowering one’s cancer risk. A medical oncologist shared the importance of colorectal cancer screenings because most individuals do not have symptoms at the onset of colon cancer. Lastly, an oncology counselor gave an overview and comparison between the current screening options (colonoscopy, Cologuard and fecal occult blood tests).

To gauge the success of the virtual event, an evaluation survey was sent to attendees. Respondents provided the following feedback:

- 100% rated the usefulness of the information to their lifestyle as “extremely” or “somewhat useful.”
- 100% indicated that they gained information that they were unaware of prior to the program.
- 100% indicated they plan to change something about their daily routine for better health.

Chronic disease prevention was rated as one of the top six health needs identified in the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment for the HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital service area.

**HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital, Eau Claire**

**Three Steps to Potentially Saving a Life**

Every day, we may be encountering someone who is struggling with their mental health and thoughts of suicide. Between the years 2000-2017, the rates of suicide were significantly higher\* in Chippewa and Eau Claire counties compared to the Wisconsin state average. Suicide is a complex issue that can be challenging to understand.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospital provided free, virtual QPR classes to local schools,

service agencies and community members. QPR, guided by certified instructors, is a training designed to teach specific tactics to help prevent suicide. For 90 minutes, participants learn the signs of suicide and three basic principles of how to help save a life.

So, what does QPR stand for?

1. Question the person you are concerned about to find out if they are feeling suicidal.
2. Persuade the person to get help.
3. Refer them to a local resource best able to help them.

“Suicide is very hard for most people to talk about,” said Laura Baalrud, former community health educator at HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospital. “Through QPR training, we open up the dialogue about mental health and suicidal feelings to help reduce the stigma that surrounds these subjects.”

Between November 2020 and June 2021, HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospital provided QPR training to more than 280 attendees. Through the 2015, 2018 and 2021 Community Health Needs Assessments, mental health has been identified as a top health priority for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.

*\*Prevent Suicide Wisconsin. Suicide in Wisconsin: Impact and Response. September 2020.*

### HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital, Chippewa Falls

## A Prescription for Better Health Through Food

Historically, health care hasn’t addressed what influences health in patients’ homes—but that’s changing.

Marshfield Clinic Health System’s Center for Community Health Advancement, along with Security Health Plan, is addressing diabetes through innovation, relationships and partnerships for a groundbreaking solution.

Instead of managing only diabetes symptoms, they’ve taken a “food as medicine” approach offering lifestyle coaching through Security Health Plan wellness coaches; meal kits; vouchers for milk, eggs and fresh produce; and cooking supplies.

Patients who have a diagnosis of diabetes and indicated a need for nutritious food are recruited from a 30-mile radius of Marshfield Clinic-Lake Hallie Center for the pilot program.

The program has enrolled nearly 50 individuals and early feedback is positive.

One program participant stated: “You’ve been wonderful and very supportive. I like how you hold me accountable to doing what I need to do to take better care of myself.”

By providing individuals with healthy meals, education and support, they can experience improved health outcomes and an improvement in quality of life.

### Marshfield Medical Center, Eau Claire

## Marshfield Clinic Health System, YMCA Partnership Serves Community

While conducting surveys and focus groups during the planning of a new hospital facility in Neillsville, it became apparent the new building could serve as more than just a hospital.

“Listening to input from community surveys and focus groups, we saw the lack of a wellness facility as a community need,” said Ryan Neville, Marshfield Medical Center-Neillsville chief administrative officer. “We also noticed that population health outcomes were affected by not having a place to exercise.”

Expanding on a YMCA partnership in nearby Marshfield, and with help from a capital campaign, a 3,000-square-foot wellness center was incorporated into the hospital design. The wellness center features a variety of exercise equipment, three private bathrooms with showers, a refreshment bar and a space for group exercise classes open to YMCA members in the community.

Since opening, the center has welcomed over 300 members. “Statistically speaking, a strong YMCA would capture 8% of residents in a community, and we’re over 10%,” said John Nystrom, Marshfield Clinic Health System YMCA CEO. “It’s created quite a buzz in the community.”

“Three hundred members can’t sustain a stand-alone building,” Nystrom continued, “but when you have a partner, like Marshfield Clinic Health System, and most of the overhead costs are shared or covered, a YMCA in a small community like that can thrive.”

In addition to the wellness center, the new facility incorporates other features built with the idea of creating a community hub in mind. It includes lease space for a local pharmacy and optometrist, preserving a 100-year old pharmacy and enhancing collaboration between health services. There’s a lobby for people to gather, Starbucks coffee and a public cafeteria.

“From a health care perspective, people are entering the campus for other reasons than a health care visit,” said Neville. “We are hoping that increases routine care and promotes health and wellness beyond clinical appointments.”

[Marshfield Medical Center, Neillsville](#)

## Increasing Broadband Access to Rural Communities

Marshfield Clinic Health System is increasing access to health care by directly investing in broadband access in rural communities.

In March of 2020, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a series of waivers that allowed the expanded use of telehealth to address the COVID-19 Pandemic. In June 2020, just three months into the pandemic, Seema Verma, then CMS administrator said, "I think the genie's out of the bottle on this one. I think it's fair to say that the advent of telehealth has been just completely accelerated, that it's taken this crisis to push us to a new frontier, but there's absolutely no going back."

Although Marshfield Clinic Health System (MCHS) has used telehealth since 1997 to reach rural and underserved populations, the COVID-19 pandemic caused volumes to increase dramatically overnight. In 2020, MCHS completed nearly 150,000 telehealth visits, up from 15,000 in 2019—a 1,000% increase.

For many patients, access to broadband was a barrier to participating in a telehealth visit, according to Chris Meyer, director of telehealth for MCHS.

“Nearly 60% of those visits needed to be completed via phone,” reports Meyer. “This underscores the lack of broadband in rural areas of Wisconsin.”

Since 2018, MCHS has worked with the communities they serve to offer assistance in broadband expansion efforts. In addition to writing over 50 letters of support for Broadband Access grants through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, MCHS provides financial contributions towards the completion of awarded projects. Since 2018, MCHS has contributed \$107,825 toward eight separate projects that expanded broadband in the communities we serve.

“Overcoming this barrier for our patients is central to our mission to ‘Enrich lives to create healthy communities through accessible, affordable, compassionate health care,’” said Meyer.

[Marshfield Medical Center, Rice Lake](#)

## Salvation Army of Barron County Family House Emergency Shelter

Mayo Clinic Health System in Barron donated \$25,000 to the Salvation Army of Barron County Family House Emergency Shelter. The funding will enable the emergency shelter to open a larger shelter to help serve individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or those who need transitional housing. Transitional housing is provided to individuals and families with a history of drug or alcohol abuse.

Programming within the Family House Emergency Shelter is designed to provide emergency shelter and assist severely mentally ill individuals secure social security benefits. The primary goal of this program is to increase the receipt of Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance among people experiencing long-term homelessness, especially for those who have mental illnesses or co-occurring substance use disorders.



Duana Bremer, Salvation Army Director, and Jenny Jorgenson, Mayo Clinic Health System.

Other goals and objectives of the project include: to provide income to individuals and families with mental health conditions to ensure self-sufficiency, to secure permanent housing for individuals with mental health conditions, and to ensure all individuals and families apply for all mainstream resources, such as WIC, food stamps, community and health programs. Located in rural Barron and operated 24 hours by Salvation Army staff, the site will offer services to people in Barron and Polk Counties.

As it aims to support rural populations in new ways, Mayo Clinic Health System is honored to fund initiatives that prioritize the work of meeting the needs of residents in local communities, including those struggling with homelessness, financial and food insecurity, substance use and abuse, and mental health issues.

[Mayo Clinic Health System Northland, Barron](#)

## Strengthening Families in the Chippewa Valley: Cardinal Community Learning Center

Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin awarded \$9,000 to the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District – Cardinal Community Learning Center for their Strengthening Families Program. Mental health and substance use and abuse prevention was identified as a priority in our community health needs assessment.

The Strengthening Families Program is an internationally recognized evidence-based family program for high-risk and general population families. Through cooperative learning of parents and children together, families practice skills to reduce anger and stress, increase communication, address behaviors and make healthy choices. Funding will be used to support staffing needs associated with the implementation of the curriculum for the program.

The Cardinal Community Learning Center has been offering the Strengthening Families Program since 2019 and the program is quickly gaining momentum and popularity as staff and community members learn more about the positive results. With the funding available, the center intends to offer as many as six cohorts during the 2021-22 school year and hopes to engage as many as 60 families within the district.

“Thanks to community support, especially the Mayo Clinic Health System Hometown Health Grant, we are able to expand and invite more families while maintaining the integrity of the curriculum. Our coaches consist of district staff members and representatives from local agencies, such as the Family Support Center and Chippewa Co. Public Health Department,” said Andrea Smith, Director, Cardinal Community Learning Center.

Mayo Clinic Health System is proud to support the Cardinal Community Learning Center’s efforts in strengthening family communication skills, being a resource for those in need and providing educational opportunities to prevent substance use and abuse in youth.

**Mayo Clinic Health System, Bloomer**

## Helping People Facing Food Insecurity

Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire donated \$30,000 to help increase food security in Western Wisconsin. Recipients of the funding included: Ruby’s Pantry in Cameron, Stepping Stones of Dunn County and The Community Table in Eau Claire.

Ruby’s Pantry in Cameron will use the funding for their Healthy Meals Initiative to purchase additional pallets of protein to provide to Ruby’s Pantry guests. Shortly after the onset of the pandemic, suppliers were sending less options for protein while other non-protein products still arrived in ample supply. For the senior citizens and low-income guests relying on the protein-rich foods to sustain them through the month, the loss of this was heartbreaking. The purchase of additional protein products will sufficiently augment their food shares, resulting in a well-balanced and well-stocked pantry that will see pantry guests through the month.



*Stepping Stones warehouse in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Securing fresh produce from local growers will significantly increase capacity to provide fruits and vegetables to local residents in need.*

The funding contribution to Stepping Stones of Dunn County will be utilized to support the Farmers Feed Program—a program that partners with local growers to distribute quality fresh fruit and vegetables to the food insecure throughout Menomonie and rural Dunn County. Various programs at the organization serve more than 5,000 unduplicated individuals annually; all recipients of food assistance at Stepping Stones will receive fresh produce through this program.

The Neighbors Feeding Neighbors: Daily Meal Service program at The Community Table in Eau Claire will benefit from the dollars by continuing to offer a balanced, nutritious meal 365 days a year in a safe, welcoming environment to residents in the Chippewa Valley. Through this effort the organization serves close to 100 people daily and works to connect those in need with existing community resources.

Mayo Clinic Health System recognizes the importance of supporting organizations and programs that aim to increase food security in our communities.

**Mayo Clinic Health System, Eau Claire**

## Supporting After School Intervention and Enrichment Exploration

As part of its commitment to rural communities and reducing health disparities, Mayo Clinic Health System in Osseo contributed \$25,000 to the Osseo-Fairchild Elementary school. With limited after-school programming and care available to elementary-aged children in the Osseo-Fairchild School District, the funding will allow the school to continue, and hopefully improve, their after-school program while also giving children a free and safe place to stay while their caregivers are still at work.

The program will provide internet access, homework support and academic enrichment activities as well as extra outdoor play and a nutritious snack. Administrators of the program hope to also be able to offer a free meal to the students and families once a month and include Love & Logic resources and information during that time.



“With the additional funds, our building will be open later, which means that this grant plays a huge role in providing a safe place after school for students at no cost to the families. This grant will allow us to focus on their overall well-being, character building, academics and so much more.” said Jimi Zawacki, principal at Osseo-Fairchild Elementary School.

Mayo Clinic Health System in Northwest Wisconsin is aiming to harness partnerships with local school districts as a powerful opportunity to imagine opportunities to serve rural populations in new ways, including those with a focus on reducing food insecurity and increasing public access to physical activity.

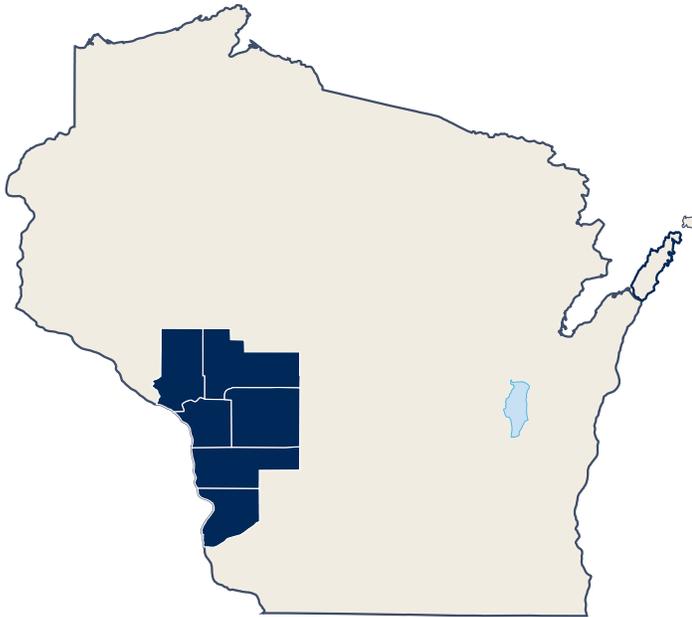
[Mayo Clinic Health System Oakridge, Osseo](#)

## Kids Community Gardening Class

Muddy Feet and Healthy Eats was a summer school class offered in June 2021, in conjunction with St. Croix Falls School District, for the kids who loves to be outside. Students helped tend a garden while learning about growing healthy food, the benefits of eating healthy, and the importance of caring for the environment. Daily activities included a mix of gardening tasks, creative outdoors activities, and preparing and eating healthy snacks.

[St. Croix Regional Medical Center, St. Croix Falls](#)

# Western Region



**Total Region Community Benefits:  
\$159,879,419**

## COVID-19 Efforts

### Gundersen St. Joseph's Develops their First Drive-Thru Flu Shot Clinic

After dealing with the pandemic for nearly six months, Gundersen St. Joseph's was faced with another challenge; how to safely vaccinate a community against the flu.



St. Joe's Drive-thru Flu Shot Clinic

Every August, Gundersen St. Joseph's begins planning for the upcoming flu season, a project that often requires multiple departments to come together to ensure safe and timely administration of the flu vaccines to staff, outpatients, inpatients, local businesses, and nursing homes. The

pandemic raised some additional concerns. Would there be an increased demand for the flu vaccine? Would patients be less likely to get the flu vaccine if their only option was to come to the clinic and risk exposure to COVID-19? Was there another way to provide the vaccine without the risk of having large numbers of people gathering in our facility?

The answer was to develop a drive-thru flu shot clinic. Using COVID-19 funding, Gundersen St. Joseph's purchased new tents, signage and equipment to host three community drive-thru flu shot clinics. The clinics were set up in local parks, parking lots and side streets.

"Some folks rode through on four wheels, some on two wheels," said Carrie Krueger, RN, manager of Gundersen St. Joseph's Clinics. "We had a couple of ATVs and even offered to fix a tire on one vehicle."

One patient's family was particularly thankful for the drive-thru convenience as they no longer needed to take time away from work to help their loved one with a clinic appointment.

[Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics, Hillsboro](#)

### Mayo Provides Community Education During COVID-19

Mayo Clinic Health System in Southwest Wisconsin, with hospitals in La Crosse and Sparta reinvented health care delivery during COVID-19 surges so it could continue safely caring for patients. Activities included establishing COVID-19 testing sites, implementing virtual options for families to stay connected to hospitalized loved ones, expanding video and phone appointments, working with local health departments, and providing community education about COVID-19 protection.

Mayo Clinic Health System in Southwest Wisconsin also hosted two virtual COVID-19 community forums. "COVID-19 Outlook and Strategies for Resilience in Uncertain Times" included experts from infectious disease, behavioral health and pediatrics. The second community forum, "COVID-19: Hope on the Horizon," discussed the organization's plans for vaccine distribution, education, and outreach, as well as the progress made in the care of COVID-19 patients using newly available therapies. Both forums were viewed by hundreds of community members and provided relevant information and answers to questions.

Two additional "Coffee & Conversation" virtual presentations were co-hosted with Misty's Dance Unlimited to help families cope with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayo experts from pediatrics and behavioral health shared information and answered parents' questions. The two events, "Staying safe

while staying sound: Surviving the winter of COVID-19" and "Back-to-school tips for mental health, whatever the setting," provided information to keep families safe and healthy during COVID-19.

## Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse and Sparta

### Tomah Health Vaccinates Local Teachers

Some teachers in the Tomah School District are feeling relieved now that they have been able to get the COVID vaccine.

"We've heard about the possibility of vaccines for so long, but the reality really hits you when you finally get that call for an appointment to get in," said Warrens / Wyeville Elementary schools principal Tim Gnewikow, who got his first dose March 4. "It really was quite exciting."

Gnewikow was among nearly 200 teachers who received the Moderna vaccine at Tomah Health last week.



Tomah Health nurse Julie Anderson, left, administered a vaccine to Warrens/Wyeville Elementary schools principal Tim Gnewikow

"I really appreciate our relationship with Tomah Health. They have done a wonderful job in setting up appointments for people and making sure there are a lot of evening and morning appointments so there's less of an impact on the school day. There has been some great communication between Tomah

Health and the Tomah Area School District which makes it as painless as it possibly can be," he said.

Despite some initial reservations, Gnewikow said he put his faith in the science to get the vaccine. "Like with any shot or vaccine you have to take time and think about it and decide if it's what's best for you and your family and your community. Ultimately I decided to put my faith in the science and do my part for the greater whole and for my own personal health and get the shot."

Gnewikow admitted the vaccine is a personal choice.

Lemonweir Elementary School Title 1 teacher Maria Klema, who got the vaccine March 5, said she had some reservations about getting the vaccine at first, but said she made the right choice by getting the shot.

"I've been very careful about where I go and what I do," said Klema, who works one on one with students. "For me I think it signifies the fact that we can start being a little more ourselves in the school. I just feel that I am able to breathe again and feel a little bit of relief that I can go in and know that I am not in as much danger of getting it or always looking over my shoulder."

Klema said the vaccine also calmed concerns about having to quarantine and be away from school. "For me it was a huge relief because I don't have that time to be sick. I have been thinking about that, 'what if I get this? I don't have 10 days to take off from school,'" she added.

Miller Elementary kindergarten teacher Megan Long agreed adding the stress on teachers has been huge.

"I think a lot of us (teachers) are tired of virtual and tired of having to quarantine and this is just the next step that we need to take to try and have a normal school year," Long said. "I also feel like it's my duty to do it for my students, so I'm as healthy as I can be so I am there for my students."

Tomah Health Community Health Educator/Employee Health Nurse Julie Anderson, MSN, RN, said more than 2,700 vaccines have been administered at Tomah Health to hospital staff, area elderly adults, along with teachers since last December.

Tomah Health, Tomah

### Health Equity

#### VMH's La Farge Medical Clinic Offers Unique Care for Plain Community

The Center for Special Children cares for families with rare genetic diseases. Their work is focused on the Amish and Mennonite communities, but any family affected by genetic disease is welcome. The deep study of the rare inherited conditions occurring within a specific cultural group represents a new paradigm for diagnosis, study, and treatment of these rare conditions. The Center for Special Children collaborates with research groups and a small number of similar specialized clinics across the country, as well as the University of Wisconsin. It is located within LaFarge Medical Clinic, a busy full spectrum family medicine clinic. The program is uniquely funded primarily by a series of benefit auctions across Wisconsin, organized and run by the Amish and Mennonite communities, with donated funds

managed by the VMH Foundation. It serves patients from across the Midwest, with about a quarter of patients from outside Wisconsin. Established in 2015, it now serves over 400 patients and families.



*The Center for Special Children is located within La Farge Medical Clinic, a branch location of Vernon Memorial Healthcare, located in Viroqua.*

Many of the identified conditions are extremely rare, with less than 100 cases identified across the world. The clinic is currently studying several previously undescribed conditions. In many cases, extensive testing at large medical centers, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, has resulted in no diagnosis for these families. By developing a deep knowledge of the specific syndromes seen in this population, we have been able to make diagnoses at low cost, allowing culturally sensitive care for this underserved and uninsured population. Lessons learned by this deep study, and the care provided, are applicable for patients from communities across the world.

**Vernon Memorial Healthcare, Viroqua**

## ***Hospital-supported Initiatives***

### **BRMH Provides Support for Mental Health Needs**

Black River Memorial Hospital (BRMH) understands the need to support the mental health needs of Jackson County. It began with the last two community health needs assessments from which mental health was one of the top three initiatives BRMH would address. Due to a lack of behavioral health providers in the area and after years of consideration and foresight, a clinic was built on the BRMH campus. The Black River Healthcare Clinic now offers behavioral health specialists as well as primary care providers.

Promoting these new services was a challenge as the clinic opened in July 2020 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though this deprived us of the opportunity to share our new facility through tours and a public open house, a multi-faceted mental health campaign was launched.

A portion of the campaign was aimed at supporting the mental health needs of youth in the Black River Falls area. BRMH partnered with the Boys & Girls Club-Lunda Center to raise funds to support the mental health programming at the Club and provided the lead gift of \$7,500. A postcard was mailed to 20,000 residents of Jackson County challenging the community to match those funds. In total, approximately \$10,000 was raised which made a significant impact on the mental health programming the Boys and Girls Club could provide.

Additionally, BRMH provided guided mental health journals to each child at the club. These journals provided them a way to record their thoughts and feelings while allowing them to reflect on the things for which they were most grateful. The center director spoke highly of the journals, which were used daily in their programming and helped initiate conversations with some members of the club who until then, had a hard time opening up. He also stated the use of the journals will continue long into the future.

Nearly half of Americans will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition in their lifetime. A challenge faced by providers is the stigma surrounding asking for help. At one time or another, most people have had feelings of depression, anxiety, or hopelessness, and these emotions can be overwhelming and begin to control one's life.



*Mental health journals*

To help combat the stigma surrounding mental health, a billboard was erected displaying the message "Helping You Remove the Label" to reinforce that mental illness is not something to hide or be ashamed of.

Dr. Esteban Miller, chief medical officer at BRMH, stated: "Treating mental health is no different than getting a physical. It's routine and it's important because a sound mind and a healthy body go hand-in-hand."

**Black River Memorial Hospital, Black River Falls**

## Now Streaming: Community Health Podcast

The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, but one thing stood out more than anything; Gundersen St. Joseph's missed their community. Before the pandemic, Gundersen St. Joseph's attended local civic groups to keep the community up to date on happenings at the hospital, hosted meet and greets with providers, and ran health fairs to provide education, all to improve health literacy and be the driving force for overall community support. These needs were highlighted recently in our 2019 community health needs assessment—specifically, the need for more awareness of local resources.

Because of the pandemic, meetings were cancelled or held virtually, and many opportunities to connect with the community began to dwindle. But the need to stay connected and share information was greater than ever before.



*Gundersen St. Joseph's Community Health Podcast*

To address this need, Gundersen St. Joseph's began its own Community Health Podcast. The Gundersen St. Joseph's (GSTJ) podcast began as a monthly, Facebook-only initiative but quickly grew and is now available on Spotify and Apple podcasts as well as many other platforms. The podcast aims to share information on health care topics in an informal way using local health care providers and staff at Gundersen St. Joseph's.

Previous topics have included mental health and COVID-19; navigating emergency care; nutrition; and health care costs, billing, and insurance coverage.

The future goal of the podcast is to grow it to include local, county, and regional organizations on the show to discuss their services and explore a collaboration with the local radio station.

[Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics, Hillsboro](#)





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