



Wisconsin Hospital Association

Healthcare Remains Strong But Demand and Bureaucracy Straining Workforce

By Eric Borgerding, WHA President and CEO



Like many Wisconsin industries, hospitals and health systems are critical elements of the state and local economies. According to a new UW-Madison analysis, in 2017 hospitals alone contributed \$47 billion annually to the state's economy in the wages they pay their 108,000 employees and goods and services they purchase in Wisconsin. Include clinics, nursing homes, and other components of the health care system and that number jumps to \$119 billion annually and a total of over 326,000 direct jobs. In many cities and counties, hospitals and health systems are the largest employers and lifeblood of local economies.

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In fact, Wisconsin health care has become an “export” industry of sorts. Nationally known for high quality care, thousands of out-of-state patients travel to Wisconsin every year to receive our world class care. Those patients spent \$2.3 billion in Wisconsin on hospital services alone (the equivalent of over 10% of Wisconsin exports according to 2018 data) and created or supported nearly 30,000 Wisconsin jobs.

By the numbers alone, health care is a critical industry for Wisconsin, providing great care and family sustaining jobs for many thousands, especially in our rural areas. And unlike demand for goods or services from other industries, demand for health care services does not much fluctuate with the rise and fall of the overall economy, federal monetary policies, or other policy levers aimed at influencing the economy. In health care, demand is largely a function of predictable, yet inevitable, demographics. While health care is one of the most heavily regulated (and regulatorily burdened) industries in the economy, no rule, regulation, or new law passed in Madison or Washington will slow the “silver tsunami” of patients now hitting Wisconsin health.

Last month WHA released its annual workforce report, again alerting the public and lawmakers to the, frankly, alarming demographic-driven challenges facing Wisconsin health care. Consider just these two end-to-end stats:

» The Wisconsin population over age 75 will increase by 75% from 2017-2032, increasing the number of patients requiring intensive health care.

» Over the same period, the population under 18 (the doctors, nurses and caregivers we will need in the future) will grow by only 3.5%.

Increasing demand for care coupled with shortages in key health professions and an overall aging health care workforce mean action is needed now for the future. And while we are working hard to expand the education and training pipeline of future caregivers, Wisconsin will not be able grow its

way out of this workforce problem. We—health care leaders and our elected officials—must be much smarter about how we deploy our current and future workforce and how we leverage technology to extend that workforce.

In the past few months, WHA has advanced legislation expanding use of telehealth, expediting physician licensure, and extending the use of advanced practice clinicians—all intended to better leverage the existing health care workforce. Yet, many caregivers remain burdened with, and burned out by, regulatory red tape. When the average-sized hospital today uses 59 FTEs satisfying regulations and government mandates and physicians and clinicians now devote more time entering data than seeing patients, it's clear much of health care's workforce problems are government-created and must be government-solved.

Celebrating its 100th year in 2020, the Wisconsin Hospital Association's (WHA's) mission is advocating for the ability of its members to lead in the provision of high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care services, resulting in healthier Wisconsin communities. WHA is the unifying voice for hospitals and health systems across the state. Issue expertise, experience, and credibility make WHA the leading advocate for sound health care policy in Madison and a respected opinion in Washington, D.C.”