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Watch for full coverage of WHA's 2021 Advocacy Day in next week's edition.

More Than 100 Wisconsin Hospital Leaders Ask Legislature to Reauthorize Medicaid DSH

UW Health's Jodi Vitello testifies before state budget committee

In an [open letter](#) to members of the state Legislature's powerful budget-writing Joint Finance Committee, 108 hospital and health system leaders from across Wisconsin asked the committee to reauthorize Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funding in this next budget to avoid a \$100-million-plus cut in funding to Wisconsin hospitals.

"Throughout the pandemic, every function within our hospital was utilized or redeployed in response to this pandemic—all facets of our operations were tested," wrote the health care leaders. "But when your constituents needed us, we were there."

Hospital and health system leaders from across the state discussed how hospitals cared for Wisconsin communities throughout the pandemic, focusing on challenges

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Rep. Tony Kurtz Receives 2021 Health Care Advocate of the Year Award

Kurtz recognized for supporting policies that enable delivery of high-quality, high-value health care

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) has recognized State Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) with the association's 2021 Health Care Advocate of the Year Award.

Kurtz was honored at WHA's virtual Advocacy Day event on April 14 for his partnership with local hospital leaders and his support of legislation to provide necessary Medicaid funding for hospitals, remove unnecessary regulations and bolster the state's health care workforce.

Hospital leaders from the 50th Assembly District joined WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding to present the award to Rep. Kurtz. Constituent presenters included Mile Bluff Medical

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WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding presents State Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) with WHA's Health Care Advocate of the Year Award in the Wisconsin State Capitol.

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

April 28
AP Automation for the modern hospital
Webinar Series

May 12
Social Media for Governing Boards: Opportunities and Pitfalls
Webinar

June 3
Wisconsin Rural Health Conference
Virtual

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Center President and CEO Jim O’Keefe, The Richland Hospital CEO Bruce Roesler and Reedsburg Area Medical Center President and CEO Bob Van Meeteren.

“It is our honor today to present WHA’s Health Care Advocate of the Year Award to an ally, a true champion for our community, and an important advocate for hospitals in Wisconsin: Representative Tony Kurtz,” said O’Keefe. “Representative Kurtz has a style that makes him an effective and influential lawmaker for hospitals. He reaches out, he listens, and then he acts.”

“One of the ways [Rep. Kurtz] has turned words into action is through supporting critical funding increases to hospitals like ours,” said Roesler. “As a hospital leader, the biggest issue we face is how to make sure our operations can remain funded and provide high quality access to care for patients in our communities. We, like Jim, thank him for reaching out to us on a regular basis and taking action in Madison to help us serve our community.”

“When the community had no one else to turn to during the pandemic, when public health needed help, they all turned to us,” said Van Meeteren. “We are privileged to serve in this role, but it has been extremely challenging on human and financial resources while illuminating the importance of our state’s hospitals. Tony understands and appreciates the work done by our state’s hospitals throughout the pandemic. He has been a helpful partner, cutting through the political noise to communicate critical messages to his constituents that helped us care for patients and keep people safe.”

Receiving the Health Care Advocate of the Year Award, Kurtz noted that he was “humbled” by the honor. “I am extremely honored to receive this distinguished award,” he said. “But it was all of you that have really done the heavy lifting. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have endured so much this past year, and you have exceeded all expectations. You stopped everything and focused on treating and slowing the spread of COVID-19. In my humble opinion, your proactive leadership slowed the spread and gave our state time to prepare. And prepare we did.”

To view a video of Rep. Kurtz accepting the 2021 Advocate of the Year Award, click [here](#).

SSM Health Wisconsin Receives WHA Advocacy All-Star Award



WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding presents SSM Health Regional President Damond Boatwright with WHA’s 2021 Advocacy All-Star Award for SSM Health’s dedication to grassroots advocacy.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) has awarded its 2021 Advocacy All-Star Award to SSM Health. The annual award recognizes one hospital or health care system for its exemplary dedication to grassroots advocacy on behalf of the state’s health care providers and in partnership with WHA.

SSM Health Regional President Damond Boatwright accepted the award at WHA’s Advocacy Day event, held virtually this year and attended by nearly 1,000 hospital supporters.

“SSM Health Wisconsin has been an outstanding advocacy partner with WHA. We are a successful advocacy organization because of proactive policy development, effective lobbying and actively engaged members like SSM Health Wisconsin,” said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. “Even as advocacy activities shifted virtual, SSM Health never turned down an opportunity to participate, having representation present whenever called upon,” Borgerding added.

“Receiving this recognition is incredibly meaningful for me and our organization,” said Boatwright. “We know the value and importance of advocacy and the role it plays in making meaningful, positive changes not just for our health care organization, but for patients and communities all across Wisconsin.”

SSM Health Wisconsin actively participates on WHA’s board of directors, councils and work groups, attends virtual advocacy events and engages directly with state and federal lawmakers in their districts. The health system has also shown strong growth in the number of new members to the Hospital Education and Advocacy Team (HEAT), a statewide network designed to facilitate grassroots involvement on state and federal issues that impact Wisconsin hospitals.

To view a video of WHA’s Borgerding presenting and SSM’s Boatwright accepting the 2021 Advocacy All-Star Award, click [here](#).

New Study Shows Site-Neutral Policies May Adversely Affect Access to Care

Hospital outpatient departments treat sicker patients than independent physician offices

Proposals to reimburse hospitals the same as physician offices could negatively affect Medicare patients who receive care in a hospital outpatient department (HOPD), according to a new study conducted for the American Hospital Association (AHA) by KNG Health Consulting LLC. That's because Medicare patients who receive care in an HOPD are more likely to have severe chronic conditions than Medicare patients treated in an independent physician office. To the extent those differences result in variations in the cost of care, so-called "site-neutral" payments could impact access to care.

In a statement about the study, AHA noted that regulatory standards are higher for hospitals and health systems precisely because of the care involved in treating patients who have more complex needs. The study found that patients seen in an HOPD are more likely to be disabled or have end-stage renal disease. They are also more likely to be on both Medicare and Medicaid, indicating they tend to have lower income. You can access a copy of the study on [AHA's webpage](#).

The AHA, joined by member hospitals and health systems and other national organizations representing hospitals, in February [filed a petition](#) asking the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse an appeals court decision challenging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS's) payment reductions in the 2019 outpatient payment rule for certain hospital outpatient off-campus provider-based departments. A lower court twice found that HHS exceeded its statutory authority when it reduced these payments; however, in July, a three-judge appeals panel reversed this decision.

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hospitals faced to keep their facilities staffed and safe with rising labor and supply costs. The leaders said that many of these challenges will remain post-pandemic. "The solutions to these challenges require us to sustain, not cut, critical funding to our state's hospitals," they said in their letter to state lawmakers.



UW Health Vice President of Finance Jodi Vitello asks the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee to permanently reauthorize last budget's Disproportionate Share Hospital increase to prevent a \$100 million reimbursement cut to Wisconsin hospitals.

As reported on by Wisconsin Health News (WHN), Joint Finance Committee Co-Chair Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam) responded to the letter with a statement highlighting past support for the program and stating that he will "continue to support the program in this budget."

"Hospitals all across Wisconsin have faced an extremely difficult year, and they and their staff have battled the COVID-19 pandemic head on," Born said, according to WHN.

The financial challenges facing many hospitals continue, Born added.

The hospital and health system letter went on to state core challenges hospitals face, including ongoing underfunding from the Medicaid program. "The pandemic should not skew anyone's perspective on the fundamental reimbursement challenge we
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faced pre-pandemic, during the pandemic and will need to continue to address post-pandemic. Wisconsin’s Medicaid program under-reimburses hospitals for the cost of care they provide.”

The week before, UW Health’s Vice President of Finance Jodi Vitello testified to the Legislature’s Budget Committee during a public hearing held at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. According to Vitello, UW Health treated the 12th case of COVID-19 identified in the U.S. Due to its early involvement in the pandemic, Vitello said, UW Health is a leader in patient care, clinical research, developing protective equipment for staff and educating and supporting the community.

“Support from programs like the Medicaid DSH program made the above possible and helped us weather tremendous financial strain under the public health emergency brought on by COVID-19,” Vitello told the committee. “This was due to our increased costs and reduced revenues—a troubling combination in any business, but especially for a hospital that must remain open to patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Federal aid has helped, as well, but has not offset the losses we experienced throughout the pandemic,” she continued.

The Joint Finance Committee will continue taking testimony in public hearings held over the next two weeks before they begin voting on elements of the state budget. After the Finance Committee recommends adoption of a budget bill, the bill is then sent to the full Assembly and full Senate for consideration before heading to back to the governor’s desk.

To voice your support of critical hospital funding to your state elected officials, contact WHA Vice President of Advocacy [Kari Hofer](#) or Senior Vice President of Government Relations [Kyle O’Brien](#).

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