WHA Information Center Celebrates 20 Years of Service to Wisconsin

WHAIC's Mueller appointed board president and chair of the American Health Information Management Association

This year the Wisconsin Hospital Association Information Center (WHAIC) marks its 20th year of collecting and reporting discharge, financial and other types of data from all Wisconsin hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). And for two decades, WHAIC has been making that information publicly available at no cost to taxpayers.

In 2003, hospital and ASC data collection transitioned from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to WHAIC, and in its two decades of operation, WHAIC has leveraged emerging technology and a lean and expert staff to continuously improve data collection and public reporting, all while being entirely self-sufficient.

"The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) is proud to recognize and congratulate the WHA Information Center on its 20-year anniversary," said DHS Deputy Secretary Deb Standridge. "The WHA Information Center has been a tremendous, valued partner to collaborate with in ensuring that timely and reliable data from Wisconsin hospitals are available to DHS. We rely on this critical data for guiding and supporting important public health recommendations that protect the health and safety of Wisconsinites."
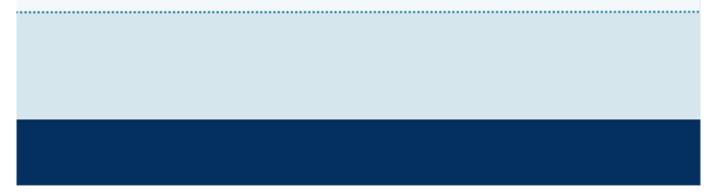

During its operation, WHAIC has initiated and maintains notable price and quality transparency initiatives, including its state-of-the-art PricePoint (online and updated since 2005) and quality transparency site CheckPoint (operating and regularly updated since 2006). PricePoint alone receives some 15,000 views per month, and a Google-like, user-focused redesign was launched last month.

In 2020, WHAIC stepped up to provide much needed real-time information about the status and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

on Wisconsin's health care system. On April 9, 2020, during the earliest and most uncertain stages of the pandemic, WHAIC developed and launched a [COVID-19 Dashboard](#), which has become a go-to source to help guide and inform local and state pandemic response. The WHAIC COVID-19 Dashboard has been in continuous operation for 1,076 days, is provided as a free public service and is entirely supported, staffed and funded by WHAIC. With 1.6 million views to date, the WHAIC COVID-19 Dashboard has been referenced thousands of times by journalists and health experts throughout the country and remains a daily trusted source of information for Wisconsin public officials, hospitals, health care providers, businesses and citizens.

"As the first leader of the WHAIC, I am thoroughly impressed with how it has evolved and thrived," said Joe Kachelski, CEO of the Wisconsin Statewide Health Information Network (WISHIN). "With two decades under its belt, the WHA Information Center has grown tremendously in its ability to adapt to the ever-changing health care world—from rapid advancements in digital technology to the transformative COVID-19 pandemic."

In 2019, the WHAIC was entrusted by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to receive Medicare claims data with an official designation as a CMS Qualified Entity (QE). Receiving this designation required significant WHAIC-funded investments in technology and data security to manage the nearly 42 million Medicare claims records and meet the rigorous standards required by CMS. Among many important benefits of being a Medicare Qualified Entity, WHAIC is able to harness the information and work with health care providers, policymakers and others to improve care before, during and after a hospitalization.

WHAIC also developed and operates the [Wisconsin Psychiatric Bed Locator,](#) a web-based tool created to help streamline transitions of care from hospital emergency rooms to inpatient psychiatric beds. Born from work by the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership, the Wisconsin Psychiatric Bed Locator was expanded across Wisconsin in 2016, and again expanded in 2021 to crisis stabilization beds and peer-run respite beds.

Lawmakers of both parties have recognized the value of WHAIC and, in 2016, expanded the utility of its data set through the Wisconsin Healthcare Data Modernization Act. The Act, led by then-Rep. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and then-Sen. Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield), was hailed by then-Assembly Health Committee Chairman Joe Sanfelippo (R-New Berlin) as tool that would be used to help providers "put water where the fire is" and more efficiently address community health needs. Just one result of the legislation was the creation of the WHAIC Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) Mapping Tool, an interactive resource that helps hospitals and their local partners better identify and then target resources to address community health challenges.

"The CHNA Mapping Tool is instrumental in understanding specific health challenges of our patients geographically," said Megan Timm, Regional Director of Community Health for SSM Wisconsin. "We can find public data illustrating the health of an entire county, but rarely can we find a tool that provides us with ground level insight into the health needs of specific communities and neighborhoods. The CHNA Mapping Tool does this and provides a way to unite us as health care partners and see where each of us have strengths and where we need to support our communities further."

Jennifer Mueller, WHAIC Vice President and Chief Privacy Officer, has led the WHAIC team since 2018 and praised their work for delivering timely, reliable and relevant health care data. "It has been a privilege for the past five years to lead WHAIC's dedicated team, and to help evolve and fulfill WHAIC's important public mission," said Mueller.

"I'm looking forward to seeing what the future holds for WHAIC with Jennifer at the helm," WISHIN's Kachelski added.

Also, this year Mueller was elected the 2023 President and Chair of the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Board of Directors, a national recognition for her years of service and leadership in health information and the impact and contributions of WHAIC.

"I am honored to be named the AHIMA Board President and Chair, where I look forward to working with other health information professionals and organizations across the country to exchange ideas for ensuring data is accurate, complete, and readily accessible to patients, providers and the public," Mueller said.

With more than 71,000 members, AHIMA is the nation's leading organization for health information professionals, connecting people and ideas and empowering its members to transform health through accurate, complete, and accessible data.

[INFOGRAPHIC: WHA Information Center Celebrating Two Decades of Using Data to Improve the Health of Wisconsin Communities](#)

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