

WHA Joins RWHC and Rural Health Care Leaders on Capitol Hill

On Feb. 14, WHA joined the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative (RWHC) with a group of a dozen rural hospital leaders to urge Wisconsin's Congressional leaders on Capitol Hill to support Wisconsin's rural health care priorities.

Joining the group were Brian Stephens, president and CEO of Door County Medical Center; Bob Van Meeteren, president and CEO of Reedsburg Area Medical Center; Chris Brophy, CEO of Crossing Rivers Health Medical Center in Prairie du Chien; Teresa Lindfors, Chief Strategy & Business Development Officer of Stoughton Health; Zach Meyer MD, a family physician at Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital Hillsboro, Bryan Weichelt, Associate Research Scientist at Marshfield Clinic Research Institute; Nicole Thill, Executive Director of the North Central WI Area Health Education Center; Mike Milligan, SVP Healthcare at BVK; Brad Wolters, Director of Federal Government Relations at Marshfield Clinic Health System; Jeremy Levin, Director of Advocacy at RWHC; and Jon Hoelter, Vice President of Federal and State Relations at WHA.



WHA and hospital leaders meet with Rep. Mark Pocan (front left).

The group of hospital leaders advocated for a variety of important federal health care priorities, including the continued protection of the [340B discount drug program](#). As covered in last week's edition of *The Valued Voice*, a group of bipartisan U.S. senators including Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin have introduced a discussion draft of legislation designed to give HRSA explicit statutory authority to enforce the requirement that drug companies provide discounts at contract pharmacies and prevent

pharmacy benefit managers from pocketing the savings intended for 340B entities. In exchange for these protections, 340B entities would be required to submit additional information. The group expressed initial support for these protections and reiterated that WHA, RWHC and others would be submitting additional comments on the proposed legislation.



WHA and hospital leaders meet with Rep. Fitzgerald (sixth from right).

Hospital leaders also expressed support for [extending funding for the Medicare Dependent Hospital \(MDH\) and Low-Volume Hospital federal programs](#), which are set to expire Oct. 1 without an extension by Congress. These programs are critical in helping to sustain approximately 15 “tweener” rural hospitals in Wisconsin by helping to reduce their Medicare losses. Additionally, the threat of site-neutral payment cuts which passed the House in December would also impact these rural hospitals if the Senate agreed to enact such cuts. Hospital leaders noted this has been an extremely challenging time financially for many hospitals, with two Wisconsin hospitals recently announcing closures and many more concerned they may be unable to maintain existing service lines if additional Medicare cuts take effect.

The group also advocated for fixing outdated regulations of [rural health clinics](#). The [RHC Burden Reduction Act](#) would modernize the rural health clinic program by amending outdated regulations. Among other things, it would:

- Allow behavioral health care to be considered primary care so that RHCs could expand behavioral health care services.
- Allow RHCs to contract with rather than employ advanced practice providers so that RHCs can better utilize the available workforce.
- Eliminate the defined labs RHCs must offer to better align with community needs and services already offered.

Lastly, the group expressed concern with CMS not allocating graduate medical education slots to rural Wisconsin hospitals that have applied for them. The 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act required CMS to fund an additional 1,000 slots over 5 years. In the first two years, none of the 400 slots have been awarded to Wisconsin applicants and only around five percent of total slots have gone to actual rural hospitals, with another five percent going to urban hospitals that serve as rural referral centers that treat rural patients. The rural health care leaders asked members of Wisconsin’s Congressional Delegation to contact the Department of Health and Human Services to ask them to ensure some of the remaining slots are allocated fairly to Wisconsin applicants.

Contact Jon Hoelter with questions.

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