

PARTNERS OF WHA is committed to advocating for the health of our communities and advancing the success of local health care volunteer organizations, through the coordination and provision of volunteer education, development resources, and leadership opportunities for health care volunteers and their organizations.

A Message from the Partners of WHA President

The Value of Partners



Julie Steiner

As we move into the new year, I am honored to begin my term as your state Partners president. I am eager to focus my efforts on retaining, developing, and growing our membership by promoting the value that Partners brings to our local hospitals.

During the past few months, I have had officers of several of our local organizations tell me their administrators and volunteer coordinators are questioning the value of their membership in Partners. In other words, what benefit is there in belonging to our state organization? We need to promote the value of our organization to these individuals. Here are the top ten reasons I value Partners. Please feel free to share them with your administrative staff and volunteer services personnel.

1. As healthcare volunteers we are genuinely interested in improving public health. We do that by developing personal connections between our hospitals and the community. From providing education to the community about how to control bleeding in a severely injured person, to providing food baskets to patients who are high risk for food insecurity, to spreading the word about new providers or the great care our hospitals provide, Partners serves to bring the community to the hospital.
2. We empower our members to be health advocates, helping ourselves and patients navigate the healthcare system.
3. Partners networking opportunities allow us to connect with other healthcare volunteers, building relationships, potential collaborations and sharing ideas across the state and region.
4. Through our advocacy efforts we have a collective voice with the Wisconsin Hospital Association in lobbying lawmakers to influence state policies and regulations that affect Wisconsin hospitals.

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A Message from the President-elect

New Beginnings

The New Year always reminds me of new beginnings. Partners has faced many challenges the past few years and has been resilient and creative in addressing them. The merger of the North Central, West Central, and Northwestern Districts to form a new Northern District is an example of Partners coming together with flexibility, open minds and a desire to preserve participation in Partners of WHA. These districts unanimously voted to combine forces with relief, enthusiasm and confidence. As our Partners organization moves forward, there will be more challenges that may require new beginnings. Rest assured we can rely on our ability to work together to find viable options to address concerns.

Currently, a committee is exploring options to make our annual convention more accessible and responsive to Partners members' needs and expectations, utilizing member suggestions and concerns reported through convention surveys. Stay tuned for more information on the 2025 Partners annual meeting.

It is my pleasure to work with Julie Steiner and the Partners board to support each local organization and the district they are affiliated with to help them with the delivery of volunteer services to their hospitals and the patients they serve. Always remember you do make a difference!



Cindy Hermel

Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect
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5. We offer our members access to information about current legislation, healthcare trends, and fundraising and service projects. This information is available through our newsletters, webinars, and conferences.
6. Partners offers professional development and leadership opportunities through participation on boards and committees and through our mentor program, allowing our members to gain leadership experience and contribute to decision making.
7. Partners promotes community building by fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie with other community volunteers collaborating and funding projects to benefit the health of the community.
8. We support health careers by offering scholarship programs to high school and college students and hospital staff who are continuing their education.
9. We provide enrichment to volunteer services and volunteer services staff with our service, flexibility, programming, and fresh ideas.
10. Our volunteer service saves our hospitals money. Our diverse attributes and talents are helpful to busy hospital staff. The value of our volunteer hours statewide in 2023 amounted to \$8,557,020.

There is work to be done as we face the changes and challenges confronting our organizations and healthcare in general. I look forward to visiting with many of you at your spring district meetings in April and at Advocacy Day on April 9.

Julie Steiner, Partners President

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Planning Underway for Partners Annual Event

The Partners Convention has been a time to connect with other volunteers and a time for learning through informational workshops, hospital displays, and dynamic speakers. The CEO panel has given us current information on issues facing hospitals and the health care industry. In recent years, however, attendance has been declining. With decreasing attendance, Partners has incurred costs for contracted hotel rooms that were not used. In 2024, a survey relating to the convention was presented to Partners volunteers. After reviewing and discussing the results, the Partners board felt that changes needed to be made.

With these factors in mind, a committee was formed to discuss ideas for future conventions. We have met virtually several times and are addressing the following points:

- Secure a venue that would offer a courtesy hold on rooms, releasing the hold at a certain date so Partners would not be billed for rooms not reserved.
- Decreasing the length of convention to two days and one overnight.
- Referring to the event as ***“Partners of WHA Conference and Annual Meeting.”***
- Having vendors present on the second day of the event.

Members of the committee are Sherry Jelic (chair), Julie Steiner, Cindy Hermel, Terri Donlin, Peg Larson, Jan Molaska, Ann Bergman, Mary Lou Bausch, and Leigh Ann Larson.

Julie Steiner has been in contact with Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center in La Crosse and has locked in October 7 and 8 for our 2025 Conference and Annual Meeting. Programming will include an opening speaker, workshops, Wave Awards, the CEO panel discussion, Partners annual business meeting, vendors, and a silent auction. Future discussions by the committee will focus on speaker presentations, workshops, and the format of the event. We will continue to look at other venues for future years.

WE NEED A CONVENTION CHAIR! The committee will collaborate with you. If you are willing, please contact Julie Steiner.

There is much more information to come! If you have suggestions, please reach out to any of the committee members.

Sherry Jelic, Planning Committee Chair

Registration Now Open for WHA's Advocacy Day

Registration is NOW OPEN for WHA's annual Advocacy Day on Wednesday, April 9! This event provides a powerful opportunity for hospital employees, trustees, and volunteers to make a visible impression in the state capitol, and offers a chance to connect, learn and influence critical health care issues.

Gather your hospital team and join nearly 1,000 peers from across Wisconsin to make Advocacy Day 2025 the most impactful yet.

Event Details

- Date: Wednesday, April 9, 2025
- Location: Monona Terrace and State Capitol, Madison, WI
- Cost: Free (pre-registration required)
- Registration: [Register here!](#)
- For event information, visit the [website](#).
- **Note:** No onsite registration is planned for the day of the event. A WHA issued name badge will be checked and verified before entry into the meeting room is allowed.



Why Attend?

- **Inspiring Speakers:** Including a keynote speaker you won't want to miss (announcement in a few weeks!)
- **Engaging Discussions:** A bipartisan legislative panel tackling today's top health care challenges.
- **Action-Oriented Advocacy:** Afternoon meetings at the state capitol, where you'll put insights into action by connecting directly with policymakers.

Advocacy Day Resources

- View the value-driven [agenda](#).
- [Prepare for the event](#) by registering for and attending our Pre-Advocacy Day Webinar, one week before the in-person event.

For more information or to register, visit the Advocacy Day [website](#) today!

Protect Your Financial Health

Like it or not, we now live in a world where our personal information can be stolen through no fault of our own. Cyber thieves can use our information to open credit cards and loans, which can have a negative impact on our financial health. You can take steps to add protection against thieves using your personal information. [Here](#) is a very good article about the steps you can take.

There are a few points the article did not cover:

- When you do the search to see if your Social Security Number (SSN) is in the data breach, if you do not use the option that requires you to input your SSN, you need to search for each state you have ever lived in.
- The Wisconsin Department of Revenue offers the option to use a pin for filing your state taxes. For more information go to <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/FAQS/IP-PIN.aspx>. You will need to go to the Federal and State sites each year in January to pick up your new pin.

Patricia Franks, Website Coordinator

Important Dates

March 18-19	Partners Spring Board Meeting - WHA
April 2	Northern District Spring Meeting - Medford
April 8	Southern and Southeastern District Spring Meeting - location still to be determined
April 9	Advocacy Day - Monona Terrace, Madison
April 10	Lakes District Spring Meeting - Oshkosh
April 20	Easter
April 23	Western District Spring Meeting - Viroqua
May 4-6	AHA Annual Meeting - Washington D.C.
October 6	Partners Fall Board Meeting - La Crosse
October 7-8	Partners Conference and Annual Meeting - La Crosse

Community Health Education Report

Live Your Best Life

Happy 2025! Let me introduce myself. I am Donna Nelson, your new state Community Health Education (CHE) chair. I have served as Western District chair since 2020. I am a member of the Friends of Vernon Memorial Healthcare (VMH). I worked as a nurse at VMH for 38 years. I live in Westby, WI with my husband and yellow lab. We have two grown daughters who are married to two amazing young men and have blessed us with three beautiful grandbabies.



Donna Nelson

I have loved my involvement with the Partners of WHA as a district chair and look forward to serving in this new role. We will continue with mental health as our Partners community health education emphasis in 2025. This topic is far reaching and there is so much relevant and impactful information yet to be shared. In the last year we received information about mental health disorders, forms of depression, self-care and developing good health habits.

Our focus for CHE in 2025 will be looking into self-care and coping strategies, connection and community, youth mental health issues, resilience and recovery, and advocating for accessible and inclusive mental health services. As we share information with you, please pass it along to your family and friends, but most importantly share with your district members and local organizations. Please share feedback on additional information you would like addressed.

The ending of one year and the beginning of a new year is always a great time for reflection and goal setting. I struggle with this and tend to set too many goals without success. I recently listened to a podcast by Mel Robbins regarding doing an audit of the past year to assist in setting goals for the new year. She is a *New York Times* best-selling author, motivational speaker, and TV personality. She is known for her practical advice on overcoming obstacles and achieving success in her personal and professional life. I hope the sharing of her ideas will help you step into 2025 with clarity about what you want and with a plan to make it happen. How can you make this year the best year of your life? Here is the [link to the podcast](#) if you would like to listen for yourself.

The Yearly Audit: 7 Questions to Assist in Setting Goals for the New Year

1. Describe your **highlights** from the past year of life.
Robbins states this is harder than you think. She suggests looking at the photos on your phone for 2024 or looking back at your calendar and see those things you did to help you. A review of this can show you what matters to you—trips, people, celebrations, walks, nature, etc. This is a good reminder of what brings you joy. What do you have the most pictures of? What took most of your time last year? Were you working too much?
2. What were some of the **hardest** parts of the year?
What were your low points, what did you learn about yourself? Maybe it was the loss of a spouse, parent, or friend. Maybe you had some health issues occur that you are struggling with.
3. What did you **learn about yourself** this year?
What made you happy and brought you joy this past year? What made you sad? Maybe you learned you are more emotional and tend to overreact and overcomplicate issues. Are you a fixer, do you try to overcomplicate things? Do you struggle with friction and tension? Are you the person who struggles with deadlines and getting things done on time? I want to be more involved but am shy volunteering myself; I prefer to be asked. I am getting slower at walking. I may need to work on that or look for things I can do that involve fewer physical demands. I love being a volunteer in our gift shop, helping bake cookies, organizing things, etc.
4. What are you going to **stop doing** in the next year?
Stop complaining, overreacting, trying to control others, gossiping, solving other's problems, talking too much. One of the things Robbins shares that made me pause was grocery shopping while hungry. I have done that, and it never ends well! Better if I have a plan and a list. But the concept could be applied to many issues you want to stop.

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Public Policy Education Report

Pharmacy Benefit Managers

Definition: *A company that manages prescription drug benefits for health insurance plans to include negotiating prices and discounts, processing of prescription claims, development of "Formularies," and managing drug utilization.*

In September 2024, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a complaint, conduct that violates Section 5 of the FTC Act, against 3 Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) for their strategy of "chase the rebate." This strategy causes higher list prices for insulin and reduces patient access to lower priced insulin.

PBMs act as middlemen in overseeing prescription drug coverage and reimbursement for health plans, health plan sponsors and more than 200 million Americans. Three dominant PBMs, CAREMARK, ESI, and OPTUM, administer approximately 80% of all prescriptions in the United States. PBMs began by providing claims processing and administrative services for health insurance companies in the late 1960s. Their service has expanded over the last 20 years to include acting as intermediaries between various segments of the pharmaceutical supply chain. The PBMs have also become vertically integrated within large conglomerates that provide a broad range of services across the healthcare sector. Their services include integration with private drug labelers, pharmacies, healthcare providers, and insurance companies. As a result of their dominance, they wield significant influence over which drugs patients can access, and at what price. These PBMs create drug formularies, which are lists of preferred and non-preferred drugs grouped by categories. Clients of the PBMs, companies and organizations that sponsor health plans, use these formularies (selected drugs) to steer insured patients to use their set formularies instead of others that may be provided.

Insulin is a key drug subject to this influence. In 1999, the average price for a known drug was only \$21. Beginning in 2012 the PBM managers began demanding increasingly higher rebates and fees from insulin manufacturers in exchange for the exclusive placement of their drug. The result five years later was a 1200% increase in the manufacturer's price to \$274. In the past 10 years, spending on insulin in the U.S. has tripled from \$8 billion annually in 2012 to \$22 billion in 2022.

The topic of PBMs may ring familiar as we have referred to it in a prior *Reaching Out* article. That article addressed the federal 340B pharmacy program, which has considerable and significant impact on the hundreds of critical access hospitals in Wisconsin that offer limited outpatient and inpatient hospital services to rural residents. Pharmacies serving these hospitals and communities depend on discounts from PBMs to supplement the cost of those services. All too often those prescribed discounts remain in the hands of the Pharmacy Benefit Manager!

One might ask, 1) Why has the role of the PBM been allowed to assimilate such power over these critical services at such great expense to our U.S. population?

2) Why can't the rule of law be allowed to require 340B discounts be paid for the intended purpose rather than retained by the PBM?

We will continue to follow these topics as updates become available. Stay tuned!

Bill McCullough, PPE Chair

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Bill McCullough

Please Update Your Local Partners Information

Just a quick reminder for all local presidents and/or advisory boards that it's time to update our records and contact information on the Partners website. Please check your local listing to see that the information on file at <https://www.partnersofwha.org/copy-of-local-members> is accurate. If changes need to be made, use the change of information form at [this link](#) to make those changes. Once completed, this form should be forwarded to your District Chair and our Webmaster, Patricia Franks at pfranks1974@gmail.com. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important matter.

Around the State



Left photo: **Gundersen Partners** held its Annual Membership Meeting on December 5, 2024. Bonnie Hicks (front row, third from the left) is a long-time Partners member and was honored by the organization as its most recent Honorary Member. Congratulations Bonnie!

Right photo: The **Aspirus Volunteer** Cookie sale was held January 8. All proceeds go to support Aspirus Wausau Hospital. Pictured are: Jan and Ken Molaska, Mary Ventzke, and Dolly Feira.



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5. What are you going to **start doing** in 2025?
Bring compassion to the things you didn't accomplish last year. Try being more disciplined in the core things that matter to you. Stop adding things to your list, maybe look at removing things. Stop letting others hijack your time and energy. What will help you bring more joy to your life?
6. What are you **going to continue doing** in 2025?
The only person you can control is yourself—your feelings, your thoughts, your emotions, how you spend your time, how you react. What worked for you last year that you want to continue and commit to?
7. What can you do today to **take the first step** in 2025?
Now that you have a set of directions for the new year what can you do today to make that happen today?
Take one step forward—find a date and plan for what you want to do.

You have a deeply personal set of directions by answering these questions and hopefully identifying those that bring you joy. Find ways to set yourself up for success, set yourself up to win, and make life more fun.

Robbins suggests that you answer these questions and write the answers down for clarity and reflection. Share your audit with family and friends as this helps you show up and support one another in having the best year of your life. Try it and see what happens. I will be waiting to hear if this helps you at all.

Always remember, *"Go out into the world today and love the people you meet. Let your presence light new light in the hearts of others."* - Mother Teresa

Donna Nelson, CHE chair

Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
May 2025	Friday, April 11, 2025
August 2025	Friday, July 11, 2025
November 2025	Friday, Nov. 14, 2025
February 2026	Friday, Jan. 16, 2026

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