

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

Become a Good Advocate

As members of Partners of WHA, “advocacy” is a term that all of us should be familiar with. What comes to mind first for most of us is our work with WHA advocating for key public policy issues that affect patients, our hospitals, and our healthcare workforce. It’s one of the 10 reasons to belong to Partners that I listed in my column in the [February issue](#) of *Reaching Out*.

Advocacy is part of our Partners of WHA mission. Many of us attended Advocacy Day on April 9 in Madison and were educated on several key health care issues which we then discussed with our state lawmakers and staff members on legislative visits. This type of system advocacy is so important when it comes to changing policy and law to create broader, positive change in matters that affect people’s lives.

There is also another type of advocacy—individual advocacy. This is important in promoting our organization. It involves all of us as members of Partners of WHA advocating for our state organization and our local Partners groups. It means speaking up about the services, education, and leadership Partners brings to healthcare volunteers, hospitals, and communities across the state. With rapid turnover in hospital leadership occurring in some of our member hospitals, we find ourselves tasked with educating new leaders and volunteer services staff about the accomplishments of Partners both on the local and state level.

You can help act through advocacy. We discussed this at length at district meetings in April in Medford, Fort Atkinson, Oshkosh, and Viroqua. All it takes is becoming familiar with the services we provide and funds we donate to benefit our hospitals so that we may share that impact. In 2024, our Partners members provided 308,353 hours of service, donated \$611,394 to our hospitals, and provided \$169,600 in healthcare scholarships. Don’t hesitate to provide this information to



Julie Steiner

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A Message from the President-elect

The Value of Networking

Networking is the process of building and maintaining relationships with others, often for professional or philanthropic gain, by exchanging information, ideas, and resources. Networking involves connecting with people whether through formal events, online platforms, or casual interactions to foster connections and build rapport.

Networking sometimes seems challenging but it is a skill you can cultivate. Use networking as an opportunity to learn about yourself and your organization, help others, and build deeper more genuine connections with people who can expand your vision and stimulate creativity.

There are five steps to networking. Start by utilizing the people you know who are striving to accomplish similar goals. Be open to meeting new people and engage with them to find common interests. Seek out opportunities to meet new individuals through organizations such as Partners district meetings and annual conference to discuss common challenges, potential solutions, and gain information. Be curious and ask questions about other organizations and the projects and programs they support and how those efforts are received by the people they serve. Finally, follow up with those you meet and share information about ongoing initiatives. Keeping those relationships viable can reap many personal and professional rewards because of your shared values and goals.



Cindy Hermel

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news outlets in our communities as well as with Partners of WHA so that our successes are communicated. Submit a service or fundraising project for a state WAVE award. Participate in our upcoming Annual Meeting and Conference October 7 and 8 in La Crosse. These are all examples of advocacy and ways in which we can work toward promoting our organization(s) and all that we have to offer.

Julie Steiner
Partners President
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A Message from the President-Elect...cont'd. from page 1

The three Cs of networking are cultivating connections, communication, and collaboration. In cultivating connections, strike up conversations with other volunteers and develop both formal and informal relationships. The relationships are strengthened when you recognize others and celebrate their achievements.

Collaboration requires the desire to reach out and bring people together who would not typically work together but whose talents complement each other. Creative solutions to challenging problems may bubble up through the unlikely teams.

Networking is fun, it energizes us, and gives us assurance we can meet the challenges we face.

Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect
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Conference Update: Save the Date!

“The Power of Unity”

“TOGETHER, WE ARE AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE, PROVING THAT UNITY HAS THE POWER TO MOVE MOUNTAINS AND CHANGE THE WORLD”

We are excited to announce the 2025 Annual Conference set for October 7-8, 2025, at the Stoney Creek Inn in La Crosse, WI! This year, we're introducing some exciting changes to the format, while still keeping many of the elements that have made our event a valuable experience year after year. Expect a variety of workshops, speakers, and events designed to inspire and educate, all aimed at providing you with the tools and knowledge to take back to your local organizations.

We're also thrilled to welcome back our vendors and raffles, which will add an extra layer of excitement to the convention. It's a fantastic opportunity to connect and network with like-minded individuals, explore new products and services, and have some fun along the way!

Our primary goal remains the same: to provide meaningful education and information that will empower our attendees to make a positive impact within their communities. The “Power of Unity” lies in the strength and potential that emerges when individuals come together to work toward a common purpose.

Stay tuned for more details in the coming months as we finalize the schedule and speakers. We can't wait to see you in La Crosse this October!



Mark your calendars! **October 7-8, 2025**

Stoney Creek Inn, La Crosse, WI

We look forward to seeing you there!

[Jan Molaska](#), Conference Chair

Happy Spring, Partners

I say “happy spring” with tongue in cheek since a Wisconsin-style spring always has so many interesting (?) weather patterns.

Having just returned from a district meeting and the AWESOME Advocacy Day, I was extremely happy to see so many in person and was overwhelmed with the continued concern for my health. My diagnosis of AML (acute myeloid leukemia), a blood cancer that affects the bone marrow, occurred almost a year ago. My journey included three rounds of chemo treatment and a bone marrow transplant at the end of August. I am so happy to share that I am feeling like my “old” self—a journey not complete but a smoother “road” ahead. Thank you for all the cards and prayers—they played a role in my “warrior” spirit of healing.

I am so excited with the new officers: Julie Steiner, President; Cindy Hermel, President-Elect; Teri Donlin, Secretary; and Peg Larson, Treasurer. This amazing group of leaders will continue the aggressiveness of moving Partners forward with new initiatives and opportunities. Thank you to each of them for saying “YES” to becoming leaders of this awesome organization. I am personally looking forward to the new possibilities.

Looking forward to seeing many of you at the Partners Conference in La Crosse, October 7 & 8.

Sharon Scott

Immediate Past President of Partners of WHA

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Sharon Scott

Partners is Seeking WAVE Applications

This is the time of year when we start planning for our October 2025 Conference and Annual Meeting. As we do that, we invite your volunteer organization to consider applying for a 2025 WAVE (Wisconsin Award for Volunteer Excellence). This award was established by Partners of WHA, Inc. to recognize outstanding contributions of organized volunteer programs.

The brochure and nomination form was recently mailed to local presidents. Please review the 2025 application and guidelines for submitting a program you've had for two years or more. You may also update a previous application that did not receive a WAVE. As in the past, there are five award categories—Community Service, Fundraising, In-Service, Community Outreach and/or Collaboration, and Public Policy and Advocacy.

The WAVE committee members encourage you to share the impactful work done by your volunteers and the innovative programs you have developed to support your hospitals and communities. The process is not complicated. Committee members will review all submissions individually and together will choose the winners in August. Award winners in each category will be notified of their respective WAVES in August and honored at the 2025 Conference and Annual Meeting on October 7 in La Crosse.

WAVE Committee members this year are Linda Holdorf, Chair - Northern District; Ginger Arms - Western District; Patricia Brabazon - Southern District; Julie Stellmacher - Lakes District; and Leigh Ann Larson - Wisconsin Hospital Association.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions.

Linda Holdorf, WAVE Chair

E-mail: meldorf@charter.net

Please Update Your Local Partners Information

Just a quick reminder for all local presidents and/or advisory boards that it's time to update your 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.

Strategic Planning Committee Goals 2025-26

Strategic planning is a process in which leaders define the organization's vision for the future. Identifying goals and steps to achieve these goals is the way toward that vision. Strategic planning is like a road map—important because it provides guidance and flexibility in times of economic changes, membership challenges, and hospital/volunteer reorganization.

Our committee of Sherry Jelic (Chair), Julie Steiner, Cindy Hermel, Terri Donlin, Peg Larson, Bill McCullough, Donna Nelson, Jan Molaska, Sharon Scott, and Leigh Ann Larson (liaison from WHA), met during the Partners of WHA spring Board Meeting in March 2025 to develop a strategic plan for 2025-26.

The strategic goals developed for the next two years are:

1. Strengthen membership of Partners of WHA

The goal involves increasing communication with current members, while also looking to add new local organizations. We will be working to increase awareness and numbers of At-large membership.

2. Share the value of Partners

Some of the steps planned are to prepare for and attend WHA region meetings, reach out to the executive boards of volunteer services directors and attend their meetings, and attend meetings and speak with local members.

3. Improve communication

Our plan involves holding virtual meetings for specific groups (such as presidents, treasurers, and secretaries), and annual conference information sessions.

4. Provide more networking opportunities

State leaders will be attending spring district meetings. *The Value of Partners* PowerPoint presentation will be made available for use in districts and local organizations. Two virtual listening sessions are planned to gather feedback for Partners' improvement opportunities.

[Sherry Jelic](#)

Chair of Strategic Planning Committee, Partners of WHA

*A warm smile
is the universal
language of
kindness*



*- William Arthur
Ward*

Partners' New Members at Large

Judy Jaggard, Arlene Knutson and Suzanne Kumlien are the first three individuals to join Partners as "Members at Large." This new category for membership was added in 2024. Information on joining as a Member at Large can be found on the partnersofwha.org web page.



Judy Jaggard, Arlene Knutson and Suzanne Kumlien

Spring Tour 2025 District Photos



Lakes District



Northern District



Southern and Southeastern Districts



Western District

Stronger Together: A Strong Alliance of North Central, West Central, and Northwestern Districts

In a strategic move aimed at fostering stronger collaboration and resource sharing, the North Central, West Central, and Northwestern Districts have come together to form the Northern District. This newly unified region promises to bring enhanced opportunities for growth and community well-being across its borders. By merging these three districts, the Northern District is positioning itself as a dynamic powerhouse in the region, leveraging its combined strengths for the benefit of all hospitals and communities.

This newly formed Northern District spring meeting, hosted by the Medford volunteers, was held on April 2, 2025 at Aspirus Medford Hospital. Representatives from Cumberland, Park Falls, Aspirus Medford, Merrill, Stanley and Wausau Hospitals attended and heard a licensed clinical social worker speak about behavioral health issues and self-care.

Also attending the meeting were state President Julie Steiner and President-Elect Cindy Hermel. The state officers spoke about the importance of being a member of the Partners organization and emphasized the value of membership in terms of community, resources, and growth opportunities. The president also shared the strategic plan for the next two years, outlining key goals and initiatives designed to strengthen the organization, enhance its impact, and ensure continued success. This plan may include areas such as membership growth, leadership development, community engagement, and advancing the organization's mission.

Advocacy Day 2025

WHA's 2025 Advocacy Day, held April 9, drew a record-breaking crowd and featured a memorable fireside chat between Green Bay Packers Head Coach Matt LaFleur and WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. They discussed leadership, team culture, and resilience—offering parallels between professional sports and health care.

Another highlight of the day was the legislative panel. A big thank-you to the panel members for sharing their valuable thoughts and insights. Your perspectives help fuel meaningful conversations and inspire action.

A Fireside Chat with Matt LaFleur



Matt LaFleur and Eric Borgerding

Advocacy Day Legislative Panel



L to R: Rep. Clint Moses, Sen. LaTonya Johnson, Sen. Romaine Quinn, Rep. Tip McGuire



Julie Steiner and Sherry Jelic



Cindy Hermel and Bonnie Pody



Aspirus Volunteers

Community Health Education Report

May is Mental Health Awareness Month an annual observance established by Mental Health America in 1949 to emphasize the importance of mental wellbeing. Each May we bring additional attention to the challenges faced by those with mental health conditions and the need for a supportive, understanding environment. Across the country people unite to raise awareness, spark conversations and advocate for improved resources.









Despite recent strides in how our society approaches wellbeing, many Americans still don't have access to the high-quality comprehensive treatment and care they need. Look at some of the staggering data about mental health in the United States:



Donna Nelson

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.
- Only 50.6% of U.S. adults with mental illness received treatment in 2022.
- 1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year.
- Only 66.7% of U.S. adults with serious mental illness received treatment in 2022.
- 1 in 6 U.S. youth have a mental health condition, but only half receive treatment.
- 50% of all lifetime illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.

Four Ways Forward is an invitation for you to take action this Mental Health Awareness Month in four unique ways across the span of four weeks. By raising your voice, prioritizing your self-care, celebrating mental wellbeing, and being the difference, you can advance awareness in your community while positively impacting your own mental health.

MAY 2025		Mental Health Awareness Month				NATIONAL COUNCIL for Mental Wellbeing	
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
			1 Practice deep breathing	2 Go for a nature walk 	3 Start a gratitude journal	4 Schedule a virtual coffee chat	
5 Create a self-care plan	6 Meditate for 10 minutes 	7 Start a morning routine	8 Unplug from screens for an hour	9 Reach out to a mental health professional	10 Call a loved one 	11 Start a night routine	
12 Try a new hobby 	13 Volunteer for a cause that's important to you	14 Cook a healthy meal 	15 Listen to soothing music	16 Join MTV's Mental Health Action Day: Dedicate one hour to connection	17 Write yourself a love letter	18 Do something kind for someone else	
19 Reflect on your achievements	20 Practice positive affirmations 	21 Take a mental health day	22 Practice forgiveness	23 Do something creative 	24 Take a break from news consumption	25 Watch a funny movie or show to lift your spirits	
26 Practice setting boundaries	27 Spend time with loved ones	28 Talk about mental wellbeing	29 Have a digital detox 	30 Practice progressive muscle relaxation	31 Set intentions for continued mental health practices		

Week 1: Raise Your Voice and Advocate for Change

In the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations (SAMHSA) 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 50 million people aged 12 and older in the U.S. indicated having a substance use disorder and nearly 60 million adults 18 or older had any mental illness (defined as a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder). Adolescents are also facing significant challenges—3.4 million people aged 12-17 had serious thoughts of suicide and 1 in 5 had major depressive episodes.

Not enough people are getting the care they need. According to the survey, in the year prior only 1 in 4 people had received treatment they needed, only half of the adults received the necessary mental health treatment and more than 40% of youth aged 12-17 indicated not receiving the mental health treatment they needed.

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Public Policy Education Report

Advocacy Day 2025 Legislative Panel



Bill McCullough

For those not in attendance, the legislative panel on Advocacy Day offered some significant insights into the workings of our State Assembly, with a view from both sides of the “Aisle.”

WHA Senior Vice President of Government Relations Kyle O’Brien moderated the panel.

Panelists included:

- State Senator LaTonya Johnson, D-Milwaukee – 6th District
- Representative Tip McGuire, D-Kenosha -64th District
- Representative Clint Moses, R-Menomonie – 92nd District
- Senator Romaine Quinn, R- Birchwood – 25th District

After self-introductions by the panel, the topic of the recent Wisconsin Supreme Court race and results was discussed. The common point of agreement was that \$100 million spent was beyond any reasonable amount! Some of the comments were: “We will now have (fair) maps to vote for whom you choose”; “the system is broken—give it time, but it will create chaos in the court”; “the result was truly a rejection of the losing candidate”; and “Maps will always be subject to gerrymandering!”



L to R: Kyle O'Brien, Rep. Clint Moses, Sen. LaTonya Johnson, Sen. Romaine Quinn, Rep. Tip McGuire

Following are other topics discussed.

Medical Malpractice

Wisconsin has a \$750,000 cap on non-economic damages (like pain and suffering), but no limit on economic damages as in medical costs and lost wages. Discussion from parties addressed either the appropriate or insufficient “cap” on non-economic damages.

Chippewa Valley Hospital Closures

While there was mutual understanding for the closures, the result created a significant negative impact on both communities. Questions were raised on the \$15 million the State had earlier ear-marked for behavioral health at both Sacred Heart and St. Joe’s. While the Assembly approved that sum for the intended purpose, the Governor wanted to expand the service area across the entire western portion of the state. The result was opposition the Governors’ proposal and those dollars have still not been released.

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Public Policy Education Report...continued from page 9

Medicaid Expansion

As a result of passage of ACT 10 in 2011, reimbursement for Wisconsin Medicaid costs have fallen short by some 63%. There has been ongoing discussion on why Wisconsin has not approved Medicaid expansion. Democrats are in favor, and Republicans propose the Medicaid reimbursement rate needs to be increased. The current state budget provides a 20% increase over the next two-year Budget, but that falls short of the \$2.5 million deficit that continues to grow. No consensus here!

Governor's bill to audit insurance companies

This initiative has come as the result of insurance companies' overreach on deferring and/or denying pre-authorizations and/or services. That practice has continued despite stated and accepted "standards of practice" that should make clear the processes to be followed. A bi-partisan bill to clarify the pricing of medical services for consumers to understand is long overdue. Both sides of the Assembly have shown agreement for these first-ever initiatives.

In closing, each member of the panel expressed the importance of hearing from their public constituents on the challenges and difficulties faced in receiving timely and effective response to healthcare issues. "We are all members of your communities. Assume we know nothing about the issues you face. We want and expect the same positive outcomes in meeting those healthcare needs."

Bill McCullough, PPE Chair

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(Community Health Education Report...continued from page 7)

By advocating for public policy and for comprehensive care and treatment we can work to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to the care they need, when and where they need it. Your voices, stories, and experiences help policy makers understand why we need action now to improve our access to care and treatment.

Week 2: Lead by Example—Prioritize Self-Care

Practicing self-care is not only beneficial for you, it sets an important example for others. Your self-care practices demonstrate the importance of looking after one's mental wellbeing. Prioritize your own mental health by implementing self-care routines and health coping mechanisms. Try implementing some of these suggestions.

- Use the calendar on page 7 with daily suggestions and opportunities for self-care this month.
- Take a mental health day from work this month. Plan time away from the stress of your workload to nurture your mental wellbeing.
- Use relaxation exercises like meditation and deep breathing to help you unwind and stay present and centered.
- Try to do at least one relaxing activity each day like a short walk, listening to music, reading or journaling for 30 minutes. This is beneficial not only as a regular routine but in times you may be feeling especially overwhelmed.

Week 3: Celebrate Mental Wellbeing

By communicating how important wellbeing is to you, you can help raise awareness about mental health and inspire change.

Week 4: Be the Difference—Get Involved

Supporting Mental Health Awareness Month also means supporting family and friends and community members who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. By knowing how to help in their time of need, you can be the difference in someone's recovery journey. 1 in 15 people nationwide should have the ability to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges.

[Donna Nelson](#), CHE chair

Around the State

Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners

Cumberland Healthcare Volunteer Partners will be holding their biannual garage sale June 6-7. This will be the third time the volunteers have staged this huge sale. Not only are hospital volunteers involved, but donations from the public are accepted. Also new items (maybe one-of-a-kind, slightly damaged, etc.) from the Corner Boutique Gift Shop at the hospital will be at the sale. They will also have spring planters put together by one of their volunteer gardeners. The sale provides an opportunity for all their volunteers to be involved in some way. It's a busy week before the sale, with many volunteers bringing their treasures and those that are sorting and pricing. The sale is held in a big shed owned by one of the volunteers. The location is perfect for traffic and parking. Funds raised from the sale have been designated for various projects including paying for the registration and hotel rooms for those attending the annual Partners convention.

La Crosse Gundersen Partners

Gundersen Partners is celebrating 75 years of service in 2025 and Gundersen's Volunteer Services department onboarded 215 new volunteers in 30 different volunteer assignments.

Marshfield Medical Center, Park Falls

The three-year renovation of and additions to the Marshfield Medical Center – Park Falls (MMC-PF) will be completed this summer. The Auxiliary runs a Thrift Store in Park Falls and raises money to provide scholarships and donates money for medical center projects. The Auxiliary recently donated up to \$100,000 toward the patio/pergola area, including lights and sidewalks at MMC-PF. The Auxiliary members are really looking forward to summer and enjoying their new outdoor space.

It's Not Easy to Say Good Bye!

Thank You, Eric

It truly is hard to say goodbye to WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. Eric, you've been such a supportive presence for our organization, and we are truly grateful. Thank you for your encouragement, your willingness to participate in our events, and for the valuable insights you've shared along the way. You have made a real impact, and you will be missed.

Wishing you all the best in your next chapter.

Warm regards,
Partners of WHA



Eric attending his last Partners of WHA Board meeting

Back row: Sherry Jelic, Cindy Chicker, Ann Bergmann, Sharon Scott, Donna Nelson, Jan Molaska, Robert Schuck

Front row: Peg Larson, Julie Steiner, Eric Borgerding, Cindy Hermel, Teri Donlin

Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
August 2025	Friday, July 11, 2025
November 2025	Friday, Nov. 14, 2025
February 2026	Friday, Jan. 16, 2026
May 2026	Friday, April 17, 2026

Partners *Reaching Out* is published four times a year by Partners of Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc. Visit the Partners website at www.partnersofwha.org. Direct questions or comments to:

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