

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

Member Recruitment and Leadership is Top of Mind

Communicating the value of our Partners organization to non-Partners volunteer organizations has been a focus this summer as we work on recruiting new organizations to Partners. Cindy Hermel, Leigh Ann Larson and I recorded a [video](#) talking about Partners and what our organization has to offer.



Julie Steiner

This video is available on the front page of the Partners website. I continue to contact Directors of Volunteer Services at our non-member hospitals and am able to refer them to this video, which explains the focus of Partners. I have heard back from a few of the initial contacts I have made and diligently continue my efforts through emails and phone calls. I believe that we are stronger together, and by aligning our efforts, we will be able to maximize the impact we can have on the communities we serve. You can assist me by referring our organization to other non-Partners hospitals who you may have contact with.

Partners is not alone in our struggles with recruitment and retention. Volunteer organizations like rotary clubs, food pantries and churches are facing the same hurdles as we are. Younger professional people are unable to commit to monthly meetings and/or weekly volunteer assignments. Creating task-based opportunities has been suggested as one way to attract these individuals to our organizations. Eliminating paper applications and in-person-only training and implementing mobile-friendly solutions may appeal more to this group. Partnering with local businesses to become corporate sponsors who offer paid time off for volunteer service is also an option I have heard about. These are all ideas our Strategic Planning Committee will be discussing in the near future.

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A Message from the President-elect

Relationships are Vital

I hope you are enjoying summer and had a wonderful July Fourth holiday. As I was pondering what to share with you in this issue, the importance and value of relationships kept coming to mind. As hospital volunteers we share a collective commitment and loyalty to our respective hospitals and communities.



Cindy Hermel

Within our local hospital volunteer groups our first relationship is belonging to the volunteer team that supports programs and projects that provide support and care to the patients and families the hospital serves. As we work alongside other people in our volunteer capacities, we get to know each other and develop friendships. These relationships provide a framework for a dynamic and productive group atmosphere of cooperation and satisfaction.

The Partners of the Wisconsin Hospital Association is a non-profit service organization that receives organizational and financial support from the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA). The underlying values of Partners include Advocacy, Education, Leadership and Service. Partners members from across the state develop relationships with each other and WHA.

Advocacy for hospital and patient friendly legislation and public policy is an effective and important way volunteers can have a positive impact for Wisconsin hospitals. Relationships are critical to disseminating the information needed to communicate support in a timely and

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A Message from the President...continued from page 1

Partners will be electing new leadership at our annual fall conference. Cindy Hermel will be installed as the new Partners President. We will need a President-elect, Secretary and Treasurer to continue with our good work. Please consider taking on one of these roles. You can find the job description of each position on the [Partners website](#). Don't be afraid to speak with someone who has held one of these positions in the past. I can assure you during my time on the Partners Board I have learned a great deal and made many wonderful new friends, all while working to better the volunteer services we can provide our local hospitals. As you think about your interest in joining the board and becoming a leader of Partners, ponder this quote from Theodore Roosevelt - *"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."*

Continue your passion for Partners.

Julie Steiner, Partners President

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A Message from the President-Elect...continued from page 1

detailed manner. WHA's Jon Hoelter provides important information regarding federal and state legislative issues important to our hospitals. HEAT (Health Education Advocacy Team) is a tool to notify the membership of pending legislation and encourage contact with Wisconsin state and federal representatives. Partners Public Policy Chair Sharon Scott provides regular updates on the Partners website and for publication in *Reaching Out*. Sharon forges relationships with WHA personnel and with district and local leadership to optimize Partners impact on public policy.

Education is a multifaceted focus for Partners. Leigh Ann Larson is the WHA liaison to Partners. She provides important guidance communicating the value of Partners, leadership training, and affiliation with hospitals and membership. The Partners Board values the relationship with Leigh Ann as well as her contributions and support. Partners has a designated education topic, and Partners Community Health Education Chair Donna Nelson regularly provides pertinent information to the membership about mental health issues. She does this through the Partners website, direct communication with local and district CHE chairs and articles for *Reaching Out*. This is another example of the importance of

relationship building. The WAVE Award is a way for local hospital volunteer groups to showcase specific volunteer projects or programs that have significant positive impact in their communities. Relationships are evidenced in the willingness to share successful programs with one another.

Thank you to all Partners members for your commitment, enthusiasm and service.

Cindy Hermel, Partners President-elect

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You're Invited: Virtual Panel Discussion – Partners of WHA October Conference Preview for Members

Join us for an exclusive virtual panel discussion designed just for our members! Get a behind-the-scenes look at what's in store for the upcoming October Conference. This is your chance to hear directly from the planning team, ask questions, and get a head start on making the most of this popular event. What we'll cover:

- Conference Registration – Important dates, how to register, and what's new this year.
- Workshop Highlights – Sneak peeks at key sessions, speakers, and opportunities for hands-on learning.
- Travel & Logistics – Tips for getting there, accommodations, and what to expect on-site.
- Traveling Gift Shop Setup – Learn about the hospital traveling gift shops.

Date: Monday, August 24, 2026 Time: 10:00 a.m. Location: Online (link will be sent and available at Partnersofwha.org.)

Bylaws Change

Partners delegates will be voting on a change in our bylaws during the business meeting of our fall conference this October. The change involves removing the Best of the Best chairperson from the Partners Board of Directors.

In February of 2023, at the Partners of WHA spring Board of Directors meeting, a motion was made and passed to “**halt the Best of the Best Award at this time.**” The rationale for the motion was with so many changes in membership and leadership post-COVID, the nominations have been sparse and interest in the award has declined.

Suspension of the Best of the Best Award necessitates a change in the Bylaws:

Bylaw 6. Board of Directors

6.2 Members of the Board of Directors

- (b) Non-voting Directors shall be appointed and removed at the sole discretion of the President. Non-voting Directors shall include, but not be limited to:
- (1) Convention Chair;
 - (2) Wisconsin Award for Volunteer Excellence Chair (WAVE);
 - (3) Best of the Best Chair;
 - (4) Newsletter Editor;
 - (5) Web/Resource Coordinator;
 - (6) Parliamentarian (may be contracted); and
 - (7) any Special Committee's Chair appointed pursuant to Section 9.4

The change in the Bylaw is to remove Best of the Best Chair from the list of Directors.

Strategic Planning Committee Report

Our committee met during the Partners spring Board Meeting in March. We reviewed goals set for 2025-26, discussed action steps that were accomplished, and action plans for 2026.

- With the goal of *strengthening membership in Partners and improving communication*, a listening/discussion virtual session was held for members on March 20, 2026, to consider the structure of Partners. Members of the strategic planning committee are reviewing comments from the discussion and formulating their ideas for structural options, which may include additional work on our mission/focus, district structure, name/logo, and communication.
- Partners added four at-large memberships in 2025. The goal for 2026 is to add an additional 10.
- Cindy, Leigh Ann, and Julie recorded a video on the Value of Partners on June 22. The video was posted to the Partners website June 30.
- Julie began reaching out to DVS's by email at non-Partner member hospitals on July 6. The contact list numbers 58. Rather than a mass email, she is contacting each DVS on the WHA list with an individual email. To date she has heard back from 5 of the 39 hospital DVS's contacted. Nineteen of those on the list will not be contacted because they are already members of Partners or have dropped their membership within the last two years.
- Since there are 150+ Wisconsin hospitals, the committee needs to further review the email list and discuss additional efforts to build a stronger Partners organization.
- *Sharing the value of Partners' organization* was discussed at spring district meetings by the attending board members and district chairs. District chairs have a goal of visiting each local organization in their districts once during that chair's two-year term.
- We discussed having several board members attend the DVS annual conference.
- The annual conference co-chairs and Partners officers plan to hold a conference webinar online on Monday, August 24, 2026 at 10:00 am for local contacts and members-at-large.

Sherry Jelic, Chair of Strategic Planning Committee for Partners of WHA

Get Ready to Register for our 2026 Fall Conference – The Power of Partners

Program planning for the annual Partners of WHA conference, *The Power of Partners*, at Stoney Creek Inn in Onalaska, Wisconsin October 14-15 is nearing completion.

Registration packets will be emailed by August 1. The hotel link will be included (room rate is \$139 + taxes+ fees).

Plan to visit vendors on Wednesday before the conference opening and during conference breaks and shop at the traveling gift shops both Wednesday and Thursday.

Please submit any ideas you may have for roundtable discussions when you submit the registration form. These topics will be published and shared at the conference.

Patty Hendrickson, a well-known engaging and inspirational leadership speaker, will deliver the keynote address. You can learn more about her at

<https://pattyhendrickson.com>.

A CEO panel of hospital executives with Partners of WHA presence in their hospitals will once again update us on the continued challenges of providing quality healthcare in our state. Kari Hofer, Senior VP, External Affairs and Member Engagement of WHA will serve as the moderator.

The following workshop sessions are planned:

- Active Response Training
- Before the After - Causeway Interfaith Volunteers
- Chair Yoga
- Dementia Live® - La Crosse County ADRC
- “Don’t Let Your Think Tank Hit Empty” (HeartMath)
- Empath (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment, Treatment, and Healing)
- Essential Oils
- Nourishment to Flourish - Registered Dietitian
- Volunteer’s Role in Enhancing the Patient Experience

Make your plans now to attend another educational and informative annual Partners of WHA Conference and enjoy connecting with colleagues throughout Wisconsin.



Become a Dementia Friend

Sixty-five people participated in a free virtual webinar “Become a Dementia Friend” May 19 sponsored by the Power of Connection Regional Partnership. Partners of WHA, along with Iowa Hospital Auxiliaries and Volunteers, Minnesota Association of Healthcare Volunteers, and North Dakota Hospital Association make up this partnership.

This complimentary presentation explored the important differences between typical aging and dementia, and offered practical, real life examples highlighting how to discover joy, meaning, and purpose for individuals living with dementia—and for those who care for them.

Presenters were Kathy Good, Founder & Former Senior Director, DeWolf Innovation Center for Aging & Dementia, Marion, Iowa and Mary Ann Grobstich, Education and Outreach Facilitator, Family Caregivers Center, Mercy Medical Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Five Key Messages

1. **Dementia is not a typical part of the aging process.** Not everyone who grows old will develop dementia.
2. **Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain.** The most common is Alzheimer’s disease.
3. **Dementia is not just about memory problems.** It can affect thinking, communication, doing everyday tasks, and more.
4. **It is possible to have a good quality of life with dementia.**
5. **There’s more to the person than the dementia.** People with dementia are a valuable part of the community.

Community Health Education Report

How to Afford Mental Health Care

As we continue working on ways to educate our membership on resilience/recovery, accessing and advocating for mental health, we also look into how to pay for mental health therapy. Therapy can be life changing. It can give you a safe space to work through mental health struggles and provide you with the skills to cope. It can help you heal from pain in your past, increase your confidence, and send you on your way feeling stronger. Going to therapy can be a fantastic tool to help lead you to a happy, fulfilling life full of clear goals and strong relationships. Sounds simple, right? Not so fast...

Yes, therapy can be an amazingly positive experience. But the cost of an average session can be anywhere from \$75 to \$200. For some, that cost just is not realistic. If you don't have insurance, or if your insurance doesn't cover mental health services, you may not know what to do next. We believe therapy is a resource that everyone should have access to, and fortunately, other people do too.



Donna Nelson

Here are five reasonably priced ways you can work therapy into your life.

1. **Ask your therapist about their sliding scale options.** A sliding scale is an option that you can address before or during your first session with a therapist. Many therapists will adjust their hourly fee to match your income or base it on the financial resources you must put toward therapy. You just need to ask. It can also be an option if you've already been seeing a therapist and need to reevaluate your spending. Imagine you've found your dream therapist. Everything's going great: you're comfortable, the sessions feel productive, and you're truly benefiting from their help. But suddenly your life takes a U-turn and you find that your finances are in a tough spot. You can't afford their services anymore—what now? Don't panic. Start a dialogue with your therapist and explain your situation to them. Not all therapists will provide a sliding scale to their clients, but it doesn't hurt to ask.
2. **Look into a University Health Clinic program.** If you happen to live near a university or college connected with an outpatient psychology program, there are students that are hungry to help at little to no cost. They have been given the same information as a seasoned therapist, but they won't have the same number of years under their belt—which isn't necessarily a bad thing. A university intern or resident could be a great fit in your search for a therapist. Give your local university a call and ask if they have an outpatient psychology program for the general public.
3. **Group therapy can be an option.** For some who are struggling with mental health issues, it can feel very isolating, and the support of a community can be extremely helpful. Group therapy typically costs about a third of the price of an individual session. You can share your story, hear from others dealing with similar issues, receive advice from a professional, and avoid the added stress of cost. While not the classic style of therapy most people would imagine, this could be the right fit for some. Community mental health centers near you should be able to guide you toward a certified group therapist that can be the most beneficial to you.
4. **Take it Online.** There are many resources available online or through an app—and you don't even need to leave your couch! While these aren't as low-cost as the other options, this is still a great alternative for some. It can also be the best resource for someone with a packed schedule. Online help services like [Talkspace](#) and [Better Help](#) are on the more affordable end of the spectrum, with costs ranging from \$45-\$70 per week. A huge added benefit to this is the ability to message your therapist anytime and anywhere. You can even video chat if you crave a face-to-face experience.
5. **Utilize the benefits of a nationwide non-profit.** [Open Path](#) is a national non-profit network of mental health professionals that are committed to providing therapy at a reduced rate. Therapist fees are between \$30-60 a session, and there's a whole slew of professionals for you to choose from. This is a great option for people wanting to access in-person, high-quality services at an affordable price.

[Donna Nelson](#)

Community Health Education Chair

Public Policy Education Report

H-1B Visa Filing Fee Could Impact Health Care Workforce Shortages

I would like to share highlights of a couple of policy issues that have a significant impact on our hospitals, specifically the H-1B Visa filing fee. A simplistic definition of this Visa: H-1B Visa is a U.S. nonimmigrant Visa that allows employers to hire highly skilled professional foreign workers in specialty occupations for a temporary period (3 years). A Presidential proclamation in September 2025 placed a \$100,000 additional required payment onto applicants who filed for the Visa AFTER the September 19, 2025, proclamation.



Sharon Scott

U.S. District Court Vacates \$100,000 H-1B Visa Filing Fee

On June 8, the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts vacated the \$100,000 fee for new H-1B visas that had been established by President Trump's [September 19, 2025, proclamation](#), Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers. U.S. District Judge Leo Sorokin agreed with the plaintiffs in 20 states, including Wisconsin, in his decision that the proclamation had exceeded the fee-setting authority delegated by Congress.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) [sent a letter to the Trump Administration in October 2025](#) expressing concerns about this policy and requesting a carve-out for health care workers given the persistent workforce shortages hospitals are facing. More recently, WHA was on Capitol Hill urging lawmakers to support [H.R. 7961](#), legislation that would reduce fees. As far as next steps, a White House spokesperson has indicated that the Department of Homeland Security will appeal the District Court decision. WHA will continue to advocate with Wisconsin's Congressional Delegation to seek a carve-out for health care, in the event the decision is reversed upon appeal. Please contact WHA Vice President of Federal Affairs and Advocacy [Jon Hoelter](#) with questions.

Grassroots Spotlight: Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital Hosts Roundtable with U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald

WHA joined Congressman Scott Fitzgerald on June 22 for a health care roundtable hosted by Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital. The group thanked Fitzgerald for his efforts working with the Trump Administration and the rest of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation to ensure Wisconsin's Medicaid program would be grandfathered at the higher level approved in the most recent state budget. The group also discussed important issues such as the 340B prescription drug discount program, prior authorization, and a request for relief from the \$100,000 fees for new H1-B Visas for health care workers.

I am happy to announce **Kari Hofer**, Senior Vice-President, External Affairs and Member Engagement at WHA, will be the CEO panel Moderator on Wednesday, October 14 during the annual Partners Conference. CEO panelist invitations to participate are ongoing.

Each Conference attendee is encouraged to submit questions for the panel. Please send those questions to [Sharon Scott](#) no later than Friday, September 25.

Sharon Scott

Email: Dick-sharon-scott@prodigy.net

Apply for the Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship



Mary Licht

Mary Licht, state president of Partners in 2017, lost a courageous battle with breast cancer in September of that year. Mary's dedication, enthusiasm and love of Partners shone brightly through her service as president of her local organization (Partners of Portage Hospital), Convention chair, Partners webmaster, and Southern District chair. Mary's family and members of the Partners organization wished to continue Mary's legacy by establishing The Mary Licht Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship awards a first-time convention attendee their registration fee of \$150. One scholarship is available in 2026. The application can be found on the [Partners website](#) on the Resource Center Forms tab. Please consider and encourage a member of your organization to apply. The application deadline is Sept. 1.

Around the State

Western District Chair Cindy Chicker has been out visiting member groups in the Western District. She attended the June meeting of Gundersen Partners in La Crosse.



The Southern District will be holding their fall meeting Wednesday, September 23 at Kestrel Ridge Golf Course, just a few minutes away from Prairie Ridge Health in Columbus. Register by September 10 to Nicole Schaefer at Volunteers of Prairie Ridge Health. For more information contact [Nicole](#) at 920-623-1371 or nschaefer@prairieridge.health.

Aspirus Merrill Hospital Volunteers held a spring garden fundraiser. Members donated gift cards and assorted items. A hospital staff person was the winner of over \$300 in merchandise. In July, volunteers visited hospital departments, serving ice cream bars to employees as a thank you for their support.

WAVE Awards

Thanks to all local leaders of Partners of WHA who submitted applications for the 2026 WAVE (Wisconsin Awards for Volunteer Excellence) awards. The July application deadline has passed, and the committee members have all received their packets with the applications.

Each member of the committee will score the admissions individually and then come together in August to select the winners. As a member of last year's committee, I can share it was a delight to learn all the different ways volunteers are supporting their hospitals and communities.

The committee members this year are: Carol Black-Southern District, Julie Stellmacher-Lakes District, Mary Venzke-Aspirus Wausau Hospital Volunteers, Leigh Ann Larson-Wisconsin Hospital Association and Ginger Arms, Chair-Western District. We look forward to our August meeting and hope to see many of you at our Fall Conference and Annual Meeting in October when winners in each category will be celebrated.

Ginger Arms, WAVE Chair
ginbud4643@gmail.com

Reaching Out Deadlines

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
November 2026	Friday, Oct. 16, 2026
February 2027	Friday, Jan. 15, 2027
May 2027	Friday, April 16, 2027
August 2027	Friday, July 16, 2027

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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