

Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.



NEWS

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Hospitals Serve Community Health Needs Thousands of programs offered, millions of dollars spent to improve health status

Madison (June 8, 2007)-----Every day, more than 40,000 patients receive care in Wisconsin hospitals. Hospitals are on the front line of community health care, providing a safety net 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The care they provide reaches far beyond their campuses.

As the Institute for Wisconsin's Future (IWF) noted in a recent report, almost all Wisconsin hospitals are not-for-profit. As not-for-profit hospitals, the bottom line is patient care and community service. Any margins and reserves are used to benefit the communities these hospitals serve and to expand the services and programs they provide. IWF challenged hospitals' tax-exempt status, but failed to account for the fact that, unlike other industries, care and services are provided regardless of the patient's ability to pay.

In 2005 (most recent year reported), Wisconsin hospitals provided more than \$900 million delivering benefits for which they do not receive, and do not expect, reimbursement. Yet, the financial results don't account for how people's lives are touched, changed and saved in communities across Wisconsin every day because hospitals breathe life into their missions by caring for others.

Wisconsin hospitals provided more than \$158 million in charity care in 2005 and incurred nearly a half a billion dollars in losses caring for patients who rely on the Medicaid program. The Medicaid program pays hospitals 47 percent of what it costs hospitals to care for these patients. In addition, hospitals that operate nursing homes, some of which operate the only long term care facility in their community, lost more than \$15 million on those operations.

WHA President Steve Brenton said the IWF report fails to account for the fact that many of the people who benefit from hospitals' charity care are among society's most vulnerable, and would not receive any care if hospitals did not provide it. "Every day, Wisconsin hospitals treat roughly 700 patients who qualify for charity care. Other programs provide access to free clinics or health screenings that would not be available in the community without the assistance of a hospital," according to Brenton.

"Whether it is providing financial assistance to patients with limited resources through charity care programs, or improving the access to essential or preventive health care services by sponsoring free clinics and health screenings, hospitals fulfill their missions by helping people live safer and healthier lives," Brenton said.

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