

Wisconsin Hospital Association, Inc.



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Wisconsin Hospitals' Community Outreach Efforts Reach Millions ***Hospitals provide \$1.3 billion in medical and social services***

MADISON (September 25, 2008) ----- Every minute of every hour of the day, someone enters a hospital in need of assistance. Some may be very ill and some are worried and frightened. Some are surrounded by family while others arrive alone. Some are able to pay. But many cannot.

Regardless of their personal or financial circumstances...they have come to the right place. They have come to their community hospital. Fear of a bill should never prevent a patient from seeking care at a Wisconsin hospital. Hundreds of thousands of patients and families qualify for and receive free care every year in Wisconsin hospitals.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association surveyed its 131 member hospitals and asked them to describe and quantify the programs, services and activities that they provide at or below cost, solely because those programs fulfill a health need in the community. The hospitals reported that in 2007 they provided nearly \$1.3 billion in community benefits and nearly 700 patients per day received their hospital care free of charge. Altogether, Wisconsin hospitals provided nearly \$200 million in charity care to 237,220 individuals last year.

“Whether it is providing financial assistance to patients with limited resources through charity care programs, or improving access to essential or primary health care services by sponsoring free medical and dental clinics, Wisconsin hospitals provide a ‘safety net’ of care in the communities they serve,” according to WHA President Steve Brenton. “Without that care in place, state and local government would have a much greater burden in trying to deliver these essential services to a vulnerable population,” he added.

Charity care is not the only service that hospitals provide. Hospitals delivered millions of dollars of services aimed at improving the overall health of the communities they serve. Hospitals partner with public health departments and other local organizations to provide leadership, financial support and human resources in identifying and addressing community health priorities.

Hospitals are making special efforts to reach those who have few financial resources. More than half of the community services provided by hospitals are reaching the most at risk populations, such as pregnant teens, people without health insurance, and those at high risk for chronic disease, to name just a few.

A few examples of programs and services supported by Wisconsin hospitals are:

- Free clinics. Hospitals support more than 70 free clinics in Wisconsin. While care is provided for immediate health issues, the emphasis is on connecting the patient with a medical home for follow up and routine care.

- Education and health screenings. Wisconsin hospitals reach millions of people through education programs and health screenings focused on early detection and prevention. In 2007, nearly all hospitals reported at least one of their community projects addressed the problem of obesity through nutritional counseling and education, or by sponsoring community-wide fitness activities. Obesity and lack of exercise is one of the Wisconsin State Health Plan's top health priorities.
- Pregnancy and parent support. In addition to prenatal classes, many hospitals offer special assistance to teen moms to ensure they have a healthy pregnancy and are prepared to care for their new babies when they leave the hospital. In Milwaukee, hospitals are working with public health and community groups to reduce infant mortality by forming medical and social networks that help support high risk pregnancies.

Hospitals Absorb \$21 Million Loss Operating Nursing Homes

Keeping those who are elderly or in need of rehabilitation services in the community is one of the most valued and necessary services requested by their families and friends. In some communities, hospitals are the sole providers of those services. In 2007, the hospitals that operated nursing homes reported losses totaling \$21 million. Hospice care is also becoming increasing more available because hospitals recognize the value of end-of-life services for their patients and families. Hospitals typically report that hospice services are operated at a loss.

Wisconsin hospitals offer thousands of access points in their communities to services as wide ranging as medical care at a free or reduced fee medical clinic, to health screenings at health fairs, shopping malls, and schools. Whether it is a free cholesterol test offered at a grocery store, or a free or reduced priced mammogram, hospitals are reaching beyond the boundaries of their campuses and making health care more accessible. By offering free health screenings and other medical services closer to where people shop, work or play, hospitals live out their missions to raise the health status of people living in their communities.

Visit www.wiServePoint.org to review the 2008 WHA Community Benefits Report. It also has patient stories and descriptions of free and reduced cost services that hospitals provide in their communities.

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