



GUEST COLUMN: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Feb. 11, 2019)

Contact: Eric Borgerding at 608-274-1820 or Tom Still at 608-442-7557

To learn more online: www.wishealthbizforum.com

Quality healthcare in Wisconsin can boost state's ability to attract business, workers

MADISON, Wis. – If you were asked to name Wisconsin's largest economic sectors, how would you answer?

You might respond manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and even technology ... and you would be correct about all four.

What might not make your short list – even if the facts strongly suggest it should – is health care.

From its largest health systems to its smallest hospitals and clinics, from its myriad suppliers to its many contractors and research partners, and from its skilled nursing facilities to its trusted rural physicians, health care is one of Wisconsin's biggest industries.

Given the state's shared borders with four neighbors and Wisconsin's national reputation for health care quality, health care is also something of an "export" industry, attracting people from elsewhere and serving as a reinforcing factor in some relocation decisions.

And yet, the story of health care's contribution to the economic fabric of Wisconsin isn't always well documented. Or, it is clouded by understandable concerns about cost and access – not unlike similar debates in other states.

Balancing that narrative while working toward more innovation and transparency in health care is a major reason why the Wisconsin Hospital Association and the Wisconsin Technology Council have joined with others to create the Wisconsin Healthcare Business Forum.

The WHBF will serve two seemingly different but ultimately related purposes. First, the WHBF will convene around and promote Wisconsin's consistently high-quality care, with a focus on how employers and providers can partner to leverage good health care for mutual benefit.

Federal rankings help to tell the quality story: Wisconsin has ranked among the nation's top four states in health-care quality in 10 of the past 11 years in which the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality conducted a 200-category survey. It was No. 1 in three of those years and No. 2 in four others.

We know that high-quality care, including preventing costlier care, translates into positive direct and indirect effects on the workforce. It helps to keep workers healthy, on the job and productive. Bending the health-care cost curve is a challenge for health-care consumers, employers and providers, but there is plenty of proof that working together can have an effect.

The second key role of the WHBF is to facilitate interaction among the emerging Wisconsin health-care tech sector and Wisconsin's health systems and providers. In other words, bringing the creators of health care technology together with the users of that technology ... and connecting the so-called "disruptors" with the "disrupted."

Creating the technological means by which health care is delivered is a broad and growing sector in Wisconsin, yet it is often overshadowed by more long-standing and traditional components of our economy. In its broadest sense, health care is not only a growing sector, but it is among the most forward-looking segments of the Wisconsin economy.

Wisconsin's population is living longer, which creates consistent and growing demand for health-care services. Growing demand coupled with innovative health-care providers and the imperative to deliver care more efficiently and effectively is what is compelling health-care innovation and investment in Wisconsin.

Year in and year out, the majority of angel and venture capital invested in young Wisconsin companies is in health care. Wisconsin has what it takes to keep attracting this type of investment in health care – innovative local and regional health care systems, leading academic medical centers, strong research universities and a talent pool looking for reasons to stay in Wisconsin.

Health-care delivery is already among Wisconsin's largest employers. There are 15,000 physicians and 90,000 registered and licensed practical nurses working statewide, to cite just two categories. That's good news, but for years Wisconsin has been grappling with "brain drain," raising and educating our best and brightest young people only to see many leave Wisconsin for opportunities elsewhere.

Given health care's dynamic future, it can help retain and attract the creative entrepreneurs, the talent and intellectual capital Wisconsin so desperately needs to compete in the 21st century. Like our schools, natural resources and quality of life, health care can be a magnet.

The goal of the Wisconsin Healthcare Business Forum is to not only recognize but to realize the tremendous potential health care holds for Wisconsin. We will do that by convening, connecting and promoting the larger Wisconsin health-care sector to make it a visible component of Wisconsin's economic future.

Borgerding is president and chief executive officer of the Wisconsin Hospital Association. Still is president of the Wisconsin Technology Council.

###