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PRESS RELEASE

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Interview: Bobby Peterson, Executive Director ABC for Health, Inc. (608) 261-6939

Most Hospitals in Dane County Fail on Community Charity Care Investments

Madison, WI – A new report calls out many Dane County hospitals for failing to justify extensive tax breaks and effectively serve patients impacted by health disparities. **In 2023, Dane County hospitals spent an average of only 0.7% of their gross patient revenues on charity care. The national average is 2.3%.**

Medical debt, collections actions, and stress continue to burden patients and families in Dane County. “Most Dane County hospitals can help reduce the burden of medical debt,” says Bobby Peterson, Public Interest Attorney at ABC for Health. “Getting sick or taking care of a loved one should not create financial hardship. Hospitals have both a legal and moral obligation to help the less fortunate in our communities,” continues Peterson.

ABC staff drafted the new report, “[Access to Health Care & Coverage: ABC for Health, Inc. Recommendations for Dane County Hospitals](#)” with the intent to inform the Dane County Community Health Needs Assessment process, one Peterson says should include an opportunity to provide valuable input into patient financial services and needs of many vulnerable patients and community stakeholders. The process should inform each hospital’s policies and practices with the goal of maximizing their positive impact for patients, particularly those who face health disparities due to income, disability, race, gender identity, or other marginalized identities.

“Unfortunately, the quietly prepared and released Dane County Community Health Needs Assessment (DCCHNA) failed to provide broad input to improve policies that promote the access to health care and coverage needs for disparity populations in our community,” says Peterson. He continues, “The report lacks **any** recommendations to improve financial assistance policies, practices, and processes to equitably serve populations negatively affected by health disparities.” He says, “Sadly, the DCCHNA reflects a hospital marketing piece that lacks deeper community input and sidesteps the Affordable Care Act requirements. “DCCHNA staffers shunned our multiple efforts to provide client-based input over a two-year period.” He says ABC’s own report “offers sensible recommendations that highlight access to health care and coverage barriers and the medical debt crisis faced by low-income Dane County patients.”

Peterson continues, “This holiday season should inspire a change for the better as our recommendations illuminate.” He says hospitals are much better equipped than ill patients to understand the nuance of coverage, eligibility and enrollment, application steps, and protocols. “We expect hospitals to understand and accurately apply their own financial assistance rules and policies. Moreover, hospitals are tax exempt in part to proactively help sick patients use financial assistance to prevent medical debt in the first place,” says Peterson.

[Read a copy of the Report.](#)

[ABC for Health, Inc.](#), is a Wisconsin-based, nonprofit, public interest law firm that promotes health equity and social justice. ABC for Health helps clients impacted by health disparities due to income, race, or poverty to connect to health care coverage and services in Wisconsin. ABC for Health’s mission is to provide information, advocacy tools, legal services, and expert support needed to obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage and services.