



**Advocacy & Benefits Counseling for Health, Inc.**  
Serving Wisconsin Families Since 1994

**PRESS RELEASE  
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Interview: Bobby Peterson: (608) 444-7197

**Medical Debt Pain Increases for Wisconsin Patients**

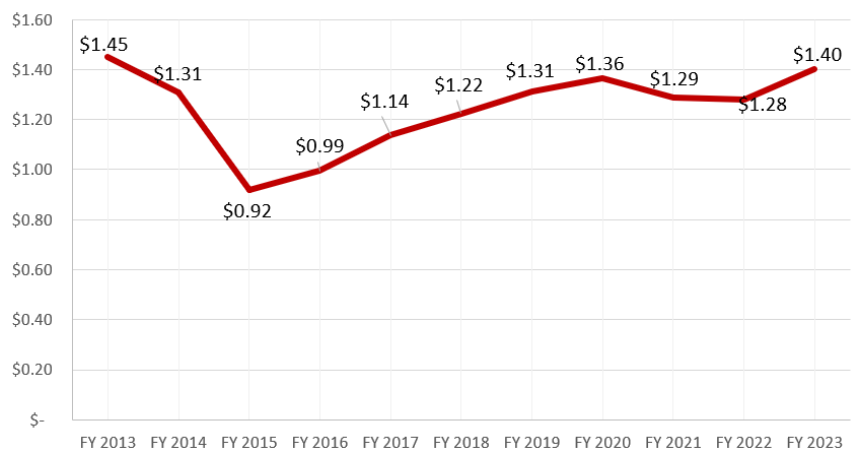
**Madison, WI** – Uncompensated care in Wisconsin hospitals increased to \$1.4 billion in 2023, according to the Wisconsin Hospital Association’s [“Uncompensated Health Care Report, Wisconsin Hospitals Fiscal Year 2023.”](#) The report identifies a steady increase in overall uncompensated care, a measure that combines both charity care and bad debt totals at Wisconsin hospitals. In 2022, the total uncompensated care was \$1.28 billion.

The increased uncompensated care in 2023 is likely linked to the Medicaid Unwinding process of redetermining Medicaid eligibility for Wisconsin’s 1.4 million enrollees. In May 2023, continuous coverage for Medicaid enrollees during the COVID pandemic ended. During unwinding, according to [KFF](#), by September 2024 Wisconsin successfully renewed about 1 million members while terminating 393,800 individuals, parents and children from Medicaid.

Bad debt for Wisconsin hospitals increased by almost 2.8% over 2022, up 5% since pre-pandemic 2019. Charity care services provided increased 6% over 2022, yet charity care is still 2% lower than pre-pandemic 2019. In fact, when compared to 2019, hospitals charity care dollars have dropped by almost \$13 million.

“Medical Debt is a public health crisis that is ready for bi-partisan community and legislative solutions,” says Bobby Peterson, Public Interest Attorney at ABC for Health, Inc. “Wisconsin families face the burden and stress of medical debt and collections actions. Federal law requires tax exempt, nonprofit hospitals to provide help and financial assistance to people that lack the resources to pay or fully pay medical bills. Yet, the tax breaks received by the hospitals typically exceed the charity care provided to folks in need,” continues Peterson. According to [ABC for Health’s report on medical debt in Milwaukee](#), for example, Peterson says charity care for all reporting hospitals only averaged 0.9% of gross patient revenue, well below a national average of 2.3%. Peterson adds, “Certain tax-exempt hospitals and health systems still pursue folks with aggressive debt collection practices, credit reporting of debt, or denied care. This must stop.”

Summary of Uncompensated Health Care Dollars All Wisconsin Hospitals FY 2013-2023 (in Billions)



*Data from Uncompensated Care, WI Hospitals Reports spanning FY 2013-2023, WHA Information Center LLC*

Peterson says, “Medical debt and abusive collection practices illustrate equity issues that hospitals, communities, and the incoming legislature must address. In fact, hospital are required to review community issues, like access to care, as part of a 2024 [Community Needs Assessment Process](#). Low-income, minority, non-English-speaking patients endure the biggest barriers to financial assistance and therefore are most likely to endure harassment, court summons, and default judgments. Families impacted by health disparities are unequipped to challenge debt actions alone. They suffer wage garnishment, family stress, and disrupted access to care.”

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ABC for Health proposes a way forward for Wisconsin hospitals: “Hospitals need to better educate patient assistance staff to address the significant knowledge barriers about available health coverage and service for some of our most vulnerable populations. Most hospitals can do so much more to proactively help patients and communities. They need engaged, knowledgeable patient assistance staff that understand system barriers and can help patients prevent or avoid certain debt.” Peterson says overall, hospitals can both unify and simplify their charity care process and procedures and create programs and policies that promote seamless, comprehensive patient care and coverage.

ABC for Health has its [“Fighting Forward: Challenging Medical Debt”](#) resource for consumers on its website.

*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.*

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