



PRESS RELEASE

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Interview: Bobby Peterson, Executive Director ABC for Health, Inc. (608) 261-6939 x201

Community Symposium Addresses State and Local Access to Coverage Needs for Patients

Madison, WI – A [Medical Debt Symposium](#) will convene in Madison on **Thursday March 27, 2025**, running from **8:30am-noon at the Madison Public Library (Central Branch)**. The Symposium will spotlight access to health coverage and care research, policy, and direct client work of nonprofit, public interest law firm ABC for Health, and its education, policy, and outreach subsidiary HealthWatch Wisconsin.

The Symposium host ABC for Health will release the details about an IRS complaint filed on Thursday about failures in the Dane County Community Health Needs Assessment Process. Bobby Peterson, Public Interest Attorney and Executive Director of ABC for Health, Inc. says ABC for Health's 30+ year history of working with the community's lowest income patients gives the agency unique insight and a position to provide recommendations for improvement. Yet, after numerous contacts and requests to engage in the process, UW Health, the assessment lead, ignored the voiced concerns of ABC for Health.

The IRS requires regular assessments of community needs. In 2024, UW Health in a leadership role for the community assessment largely ignored ABC's request to provide data and client focused input into the process. The complaint maintains that the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) failed to take into account the perspective of the many communities ABC represents. Peterson writes, "Unsurprisingly, this report ignored access to health care coverage issues. The report lacks any recommendations to improve financial assistance policies, practices, and processes to equitably serve populations negatively affected by health disparities. It fails to address the impact of medical debt on Dane County patients."

Peterson says, "ABC filed the complaint to address UW Health's insistence to exclude medical debt and patient financial assistance from consideration during the CHNA process. These actions betray many principles, requirements and community responsibilities of tax-exempt non-profit hospitals. Peterson continues, "We fear that UW Health's intentional indifference towards the medical debt epidemic stems from a value for their own revenue at the expense of their community. That value is at odds with UW Health's duty towards its community, exemplified by the 501(r) requirements." Locally there is room for significant improvement. **Nationally, hospitals dedicated on average about 2.3% of revenues to charity care, while hospitals in Dane County struggle to even reach 1%.**

Despite being ignored, ABC released its own [report](#) titled: "Access to Health Care & Coverage: ABC for Health, Inc. Recommendations for Dane County Hospitals." In its report, ABC asks Dane County hospitals to improve access to health coverage and care issues to justify extensive tax breaks and better serve patients affected by health disparities and medical debts.

Changes are likely, says Peterson, for Medicaid, Medicare, or even Social Security. Federal actions will likely threaten services and programs for low-income, vulnerable patients. "We all need to pull together, be proactive, and seek and listen to *all* voices in the community. We can also remove red tape and



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bureaucracies that keep financial assistance programs from running seamlessly. We need to be sure our clients' issues are part of that conversation, to continue.”

The event registration has closed. Media are welcome, but please provide notice if they want to ask questions as we seek to avoid disruptions to our timeline and speakers.

[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.