

Money Needs to be Released to Stabilize Healthcare Industry Across Chippewa Valley

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin
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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/chippewa-valley-hshs-s440.jpg>



Republicans continue obstructing release of \$15 million in crisis response resources aimed at stabilizing healthcare access across Chippewa Valley region even as hospitals accelerate plans to close this week.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today blasted Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature for their continued delays in releasing \$15 million in already-approved funds to help stabilize healthcare access in Western Wisconsin in the wake of the recent announcement of HSHS and Prevea Health's decision to close several locations. Over two weeks ago now, Gov. Evers approved Senate Bill (SB) 1015, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 97, securing \$15 million in crisis response resources to support healthcare access in Western Wisconsin in the wake of the recent announcement of HSHS and Prevea Health's [decision to close](#) several locations.

Gov. Evers is urging immediate action as, just last week, HSHS [announced](#) its plans to close HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire and HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls on March 22, 2024, approximately a month earlier than had [previously](#) been announced, underscoring the urgent need for these funds to be released and distributed to partners in the community working to offset the burden of these closures.

Republicans continue to ignore repeated requests from Gov. Evers to release \$15 million in crisis response funding and have given no apparent indication of when or if they plan to release the critical investments. The crisis response resources approved by Gov. Evers continue to be stalled in the Republican-controlled Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), which has declined to release the funds to date. The Committee met [last week](#) but declined once again to add these critical investments to their meeting agenda. Republicans on the JFC are [similarly obstructing \\$125 million to fight PFAS](#)

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contamination statewide, which have now been languishing in Madison for over 250 days and counting. A list of legislators who sit on the JFC is [available here](#).

Gov. Evers today continued his calls for these funds to be released while touring three healthcare facilities in Western Wisconsin, including the NorthLakes Community Clinic in Eau Claire, where he met with providers and staff to learn more about their efforts to ensure continuity of care for Wisconsinites in the region.



“With less than a week until now-expedited hospital closures that will have serious impacts on families and healthcare access needs, Republicans are continuing to obstruct the release of \$15 million in crisis response resources to help support the healthcare industry across the Chippewa Valley. What are Republicans waiting for? Enough is enough. It is time to act,” urged Gov. Evers.

“My administration has been on the ground from the beginning, working to support the region in the wake of these hospital closure announcements. We’ve heard directly from local partners and community members about how we can best support them. It’s why I made improvements to Act 97 to enable these crisis response resources to fund any hospital services that meet area needs, including OB-GYN services, mental health and substance use services, and inpatient psychiatry—which is critical for local law enforcement—among other key healthcare options we know will be impacted by these hospital closures,” Gov. Evers continued. “These continued delays by Republican lawmakers are simply unacceptable. I am again urging Republicans to immediately release these funds so my administration can continue our efforts supporting families, communities, and healthcare access needs across Western Wisconsin.”

Gov. Evers approved Act 97 with improvements through line-item vetoes to provide additional flexibility for the \$15 million crisis response investment, enabling the resources to be used to fund any hospital services meeting the area’s pressing healthcare needs, including urgent care services, OB-GYN services, inpatient psychiatry services, and mental health and substance use services, among others. Without the governor’s vetoes, these services would not have been eligible under SB 1015.

SB 1015, as passed by the Legislature, included unnecessary restrictions on the \$15 million

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crisis response funding, limiting the funds to be used only for hospital emergency department services exclusively. The governor's partial vetoes improved the bill significantly, broadening the scope of the grants that will be available under the bill and allowing the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to make the crisis response funds available for any hospital services that meet the needs of the region.

In addition to severely impacting healthcare access in the area, according to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the closures have been estimated to impact approximately 1,400 workers, among others, in the surrounding region. Gov. Evers directed DHS to submit an official request to the JFC to immediately release the \$15 million provided for under Act 97. A copy of the request submitted by DHS to JFC is available [here](#). The plan request submitted by DHS reflects the governor's improvements made to the bill.

More information on the governor's veto message and the Evers Administration's ongoing rapid response efforts to the HSHS and Prevea health systems closures is available [here](#).