

The Arkansas Connection

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” -Helen Keller

Working closely with the Arkansas Hospital Association (ArHA) for more than 60 years, the Arkansas Hospital Auxiliary Association (AHAA) is proud of its long, successful partnership with the ArHA in advocating for hospitals and health care.

The first Arkansas Council of Hospital Auxiliaries was organized in 1955 at the request of the ArHA. AHAA is proud of the fact that Arkansas was the second state to grant a permanent seat on the hospital association's board of directors to the state hospital auxiliary association president. Each year, the sitting AHAA President joins the ArHA's Board of Directors with full participation and voting responsibilities. Likewise, the ArHA President serves on the AHAA's Board of Directors.

We have close proximity to the ArHA leadership and staff at bimonthly AHAA board meetings, held at the association headquarters. A senior member of ArHA's Executive Team attends each of these gatherings, bringing both state and federal legislative updates to the AHAA leadership. We also appreciate the luncheon the ArHA provides at each of these sessions.

Amber Estrada, ArHA Administrative Assistant to the CEO, serves as our ArHA liaison. She works closely with AHAA leadership, seeing to it that all our administrative needs are met and providing a wealth of assistance throughout each year. Her assistance in putting AHAA “on the Web” and then helping us establish our own website have been invaluable.

Amber works closely with AHAA presidents during their term. She orders and sets up our lunch for our board meetings, makes copies prior to the meeting and so much more. Amber is a joy and delight to work with and so appreciated by AHAA. Prior to 2014 when we set up our AHAA website www.arhaa.org, the ArHA provided a section on their web page for our online newsletter. Amber worked patiently with our AHAA Newsletter Editors to get our news posted online.

Joint Sessions Draw Hundreds

Because of the close-knit relationship between the association and our organization, the AHAA's Annual Convention and the ArHA's Annual Meeting and Trade Show have been held concurrently since 1958. The highlight of our AHAA Convention is joining the ArHA for the Keynote Session. ArHA generously provides transportation for all members attending the AHAA Convention to travel across town to attend this joint session, which features special recognition of AHAA members, the honoring of our President and his/her announcement of AHAA's CEO of the Year awards.

The joint keynote session allows AHAA members to learn from nationally recognized speakers – something our budget could not otherwise afford. We greatly enjoy this session and the extra fun its last minutes hold. At the conclusion of the meeting, a drawing is held that features five \$100 cash prizes, each going to an AHAA member and provided by the ArHA.

Legislative Advocacy

The spring of 2013 brought a special call to AHAA to rally in ArHA's backing of our state's option for passage of expanded coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Arkansas had a unique plan for meeting the stipulations of the ACA. Called the Private Option and now known as Arkansas Works, the plan required a 3/4 (75 of 100 House members and 27 of 35 Senate members) majority to pass in our state legislature. Everyone knew this would be a laborious and challenging task.

On a beautiful spring day made brighter by the sea of colors of hundreds of volunteers in our auxiliary uniforms, many of our members got their first taste of in-person legislative advocacy. The stand we took for ArHA, our hospitals, and the 500,000 uninsured in our state at that time was strong and unwavering. Speeches from leaders from across the state and individual stories from people who were uninsured were delivered on the steps of the Capitol; we heard the message and, knowing the good passage of the Private Option would do for Arkansas hospitals and patients, we enthusiastically carried it forward.

Armed with Talking Points provided by ArHA's Executive Team, we lined the halls of the Arkansas Capitol to meet with legislators from our respective communities. Traversing the Capitol from the Senate side to the House side, we met with our home legislators, often calling them out of legislative meetings and sessions to visit one-on-one. Our representation and rally at the Capitol made an undeniable impression on these elected leaders about the effect the Private Option could have in our home communities. It was a great victory for Arkansas when the Private Option passed in both houses of the

legislature. This has allowed our state to lead the nation in implementing a program using Medicaid funds to purchase private health insurance on the marketplace for people who are eligible for expanded Medicaid under the ACA.

Between 2013 and 2016, the number of uninsured individuals in Arkansas declined by 50.1%. What a victory for the uninsured and for our hospitals, which previously were financially burdened by the overwhelming cost of uncompensated care delivered in our state. The Private Option has not eliminated uncompensated care, but it has cut the amount of uncompensated care our hospitals must provide. It also has given previously uninsured people in our communities access to essential health services.

We haven't been called again to the Capitol to rally as a group, but AHAA members stay informed during each legislative session through the ArHA's *Legislative Bulletin*. This is a weekly newsletter from the ArHA's Vice President for Government Affairs, Jodiane Tritt that keeps us posted on major bills, especially those affecting health care. Through this newsletter we learn about issues requiring local input. We can then engage with our state Senators and Representatives through and our grassroots legislative contact website, voterVOICE, which is a handy tool used by AHAA members and others to make contact easily with our elected officials. When Jodiane tells us a Yes or No vote on bills affecting our hospitals is needed, we respond by calling or sending messages to our legislators through voterVOICE.

We engage at the federal level as well. Each year, AHAA's President, President-Elect and State Legislative Chair accompany Arkansas hospital administrators, trustees, physicians and ArHA staff to Washington, D.C. to take part in visits with each member of the Arkansas Congressional Delegation.

Small, but Mighty

The ArHA is made up of 101 of the 106 hospitals across Arkansas. Our hospitals range from 25 to 827 beds. The majority of our small, rural hospitals have fewer than 50 beds, but they are vital to the health care and economies of the communities they serve. Many Arkansas counties are home to hospitals that are among the top five employers in the county. More than 45,000 Arkansans are employed in full- and part-time capacities by hospitals across the state.

AHAA has a membership of 6,619 Volunteers/Volunteers. In 2017, our volunteers donated 898,497 hours, contributed \$3,831,348 to support Arkansas hospitals, and supplied scholarships for those entering the health care field. While the hours and the dollars are greatly appreciated, we are finding our advocacy efforts for ArHA may be our most valuable asset.

ArHA and AHAA have built a very cohesive relationship. It's about unity and caring, and it is working well in Arkansas. I encourage you to connect with your state hospital association, because together you can do so much more!

Lynn Smith began volunteering in 2001 at Medical Center of South Arkansas in El Dorado, Arkansas. In 2011-2012 she served as AHAA state president. Lynn is currently serving her 6th and final year on the national American Hospital Association Volunteer Advisory Council (formerly Committee on Volunteers, or COV). She served as COV Chair in 2015-2016. In 2014 she and her husband, Jerry, moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas where she continues to volunteer at CHI St Vincent-Hot Springs.



Lynn Smith
AHVRP 2018 Volunteer Advisory Council (VAC)