

## Improving Health Care Access and Combatting the Opioid Crisis

As chair of the Senate Committee on Health, I've had the opportunity to work with my colleagues and stakeholders to advance several bills that improve access to quality health care in Wisconsin. One way to increase access is to address workforce needs; that's why Rep. Rachel Cabral-Guevara (Appleton) and I authored legislation that eliminates barriers limiting the practice of Advance Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). By empowering professionals to utilize the full extent of their skillset and training, we free them to provide additional help to more people. We advanced this bill through the committee, it passed both houses of the legislature, and now needs only the Governor's signature to become law.

The committee also advanced legislation that I authored with Rep. Todd Novak (Dodgeville) that improves access by investing in community health centers. There are seventeen community health centers with nearly 200 satellite sites operating in every corner of the state and serving over 300,000 Wisconsinites. The legislation we passed through the committee served as a catalyst to help secure increased funding for these centers in the 2021-'23 budget.

The pandemic revealed obstacles standing between patients and care that we needed to remove. Last session, the legislature allowed hospitals to seek Medicare reimbursement for a number of medical services provided in a home setting. This session, the committee moved forward legislation authored by Sen. Dale Kooyenga (Brookfield) and Rep. Amy Loudenbeck (Clinton) to make that change permanent. The bill was enacted this week.

In addition to improving access to quality care, the Senate Committee on Health also continued to combat the state's opioid crisis. Until now, Wisconsin has had several state agencies collecting data on opioid and methamphetamine use, but no central location where it can be stored and analyzed. I authored a bill with Rep. Jon Plumer (Lodi) that will ensure this data will be gathered in a central location so that the state can get a more comprehensive picture of the problem and new ways to fight it. Rep. Plumer and I also wrote legislation that determines how money from the settlement of the multi-district opioid litigation is distributed throughout the state, ensuring that the majority of the settlement go to local governments to bolster their efforts to battle against these drugs. Both of these bills started the legislative process in the Senate Health Committee and have now become law.

We've made progress, but the work is not done yet. I enjoy working with health care leaders across the state to enhance health outcomes in Wisconsin.