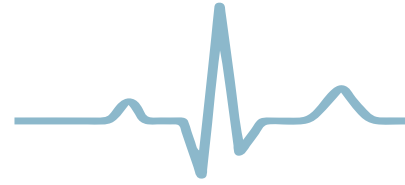


# HealthBeat

FALL 2023



**Patti Banks, CEO**  
Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital

“There are ways we can help each other that don't require a special talent or education.

The team at Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital (EBCH) has been working hard to more clearly define our role within the community and the ways we can improve community health. It has led to innovations in how we care for patients, both inside and outside the hospital walls.

“If anything good came out of the pandemic, it might be that we interacted with a larger cross section of the community, making us more aware of the challenges some of our neighbors face when it comes to living a healthy life,” said CEO Patti Banks.

While EBCH can't be everything to everybody, we can find ways to collaborate with community partners. We can get better at recognizing obstacles to care. We can make sure our actions match our best intentions.

One way EBCH is taking action is through a grant from the Minnesota Path to Value Project, with EBCH learning to better identify patients who could benefit from mental health services or substance-use disorder treatment and connecting them to resources both in and outside of the community.

“This project has helped us understand the strength and variety of community resources,” Banks explained. “We have built up collaborative partnerships that help us take better care of our patients beyond their time of crisis.”

The Community Liaison Committee recently initiated a program called Blessings Backpacks. The committee uses donations to fill backpacks with essential items, basic toiletries and hygiene products. Initially deployed in the

Emergency Department, any staff member can share a Blessings Backpack with any patient.

“The program is meant to remove barriers and enable us to go above and beyond for someone who is struggling in the moment,” Banks shared.

Other community health projects include free flu shots throughout the fall and encouraging sports physicals and annual well checks throughout the year. Visit [ebch.org](http://ebch.org) or call **218-365-3271** for dates and locations.

“We know it is important to be here for people during a crisis,” Banks confirmed, “but we also know there is a need to be more than that. Compassionate little acts of kindness create environments for better health overall.”

# BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CRISIS

## Helping Patients with Mental Health Struggles or Substance-Use Disorders Get the Help They Need

As a rural critical access hospital, Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital is not always able to provide specialists in every aspect of care. While they often help people experiencing a mental health crisis or substance-use disorder in the Emergency Department, EBCH does not have a behavioral health department or specific staff to provide follow-up care once they have helped patients through a crisis event.

"As the face of healthcare in this area, we tend to be the door that people start with," said EBCH Social Worker Linda O'Neill DeRemee. "We realized that, as an entry point for patients locally, we needed to create a plan to deliberately and compassionately hand off patients to the right community partner to ensure ongoing comprehensive care."

Thanks to a long-term grant program through the National Rural Health Resource Center (NRHRC), and supported by the Minnesota Department of Health, EBCH is one of only a handful of hospitals in the state getting technical assistance and guided support to tackle a population health concern. The grant program is called the Minnesota Path to Value – information about the state-wide initiative of the Minnesota Department of Health can be found online at [ruralcenter.org/programs/mnptv](https://ruralcenter.org/programs/mnptv).



## How It Works

The Minnesota Path to Value grant program is set up to be much more than a funding source. After identifying a project that could have significant impact, the program provides education and training around the issue, shares experience and resources to generate ideas and solutions, and then remains actively involved for several years afterward to ensure successful implementation. Minnesota Path to Value creates a partnership, ensuring it can mentor participating hospitals, while using knowledge, expertise and best practices.

"Sometimes the hardest part is knowing where to start and what steps to take in order to really move the needle and make a difference," DeRemee explained. "This program provides the guidance we need to tap into experts who have done this before, so we can move forward with confidence and a clear strategy."

EBCH identified a recurring issue of people with either mental health or substance-use struggles who waited until they were in crisis to seek out treatment. The Emergency Department is able to help them through the moment, but without in-house resources to refer to for follow-up care, those patients would often end up in a cycle of crisis care rather than getting the ongoing support they needed.

"It can be difficult enough to ask for help," shared DeRemee. "We want people's courage to be rewarded with more than a momentary fix. People deserve an easier path to ongoing relief and stability."



Some of the steps EBCH has already taken toward breaking the cycle of crisis include:

- Establishing new or stronger relationships with local support organizations that have expertise in mental health treatment or substance-use disorder counseling
- Increasing training for Emergency Department staff regarding mental health issues and substance-use disorders
- Enhancing the patient visit with a social worker in the EBCH Emergency Department to enable more direct handoffs to a partner organization for follow-up care
- Using a universal release form to simplify the referral process to outside organizations
- Connecting patients with a care facilitator or mental health professional who can help them navigate additional local resources and ensure they receive follow-up care

"Since we started our work with the Minnesota Path to Value project, I've had patients come back to me after helping them with placement within a local program," DeRemee shared. "They said this process was really helpful and that it was what they needed to make progress."

If you or someone you know needs help before it becomes a crisis, reach out to EBCH Social Worker Linda O'Neill DeRemee, MSW, LGSW by calling **218-365-8758**.

## Turning Crisis Care Into Better Care

EBCH is always here to help when you need it, but Linda wants people to know they don't have to go to the Emergency Department to establish care for a substance-use disorder or mental health issue.

"For whatever reason, people often hurt for a long time before asking for help," said DeRemee. "We understand that it can be hard to ask for help when you don't know who to ask or where to go, so we're trying to remove as many obstacles as possible and make it easier to find the help you are looking for."

Linda recommends the following steps for anyone looking for guidance:

- Choose a primary care provider and get regular annual wellness checks.
- Don't be afraid to talk to your primary care provider about your concerns. They are there to help.
- Look into local resources through the Ely Community Care Team website at [elycct.org](http://elycct.org) or at [pathwaystowellnessmn.org](http://pathwaystowellnessmn.org).

"The path to recovery is easier with early intervention," DeRemee encouraged. "I think we just want people to know they are all important and deserve to get the care they need. We are happy to be their threshold to that care and get them connected to the right resources."

# BLESSINGS IN A BACKPACK

## New Program Provides Basic Essentials in Time of Need

It can be hard to keep a wound clean when you can't afford bandages...or soap. What if your housing situation was unstable or food wasn't guaranteed? Would a toothbrush be your first priority?

*"We have a screening process to help us identify patients in need, but people in a temporary situation don't necessarily define themselves as homeless or hungry, or they don't want to share information that feels private. "The Blessings Backpack program enables anyone within the hospital to offer this gift to a patient. No forms. No questions. It's just meant to be a helping hand in that moment."*



## What is a Blessings Backpack?

According to EBCH Marketing and Communications Team Leader Jodi Martin, a Blessings Backpack is a bag filled with some basic essentials, such as socks, shampoo, soap, a toothbrush, toothpaste and a small First Aid kit. The person giving out the backpack has the option to add items, depending on the situation. Additional items could include a shaving kit, feminine hygiene products or even a snack.

"The backpacks are intended to remove any barriers to receiving help," Martin explained. "In addition to the standard items, each backpack comes with a handwritten card that lets the recipient know we care about them and hope the gift brings them some comfort and relief. We also include a list of local resources to ensure people know there is a network of help available."

The Blessings Backpack program was born from the hospital's Community Liaison Committee, a group of "community champions" who meet bi-monthly to discuss ways to better address community health and overlooked needs.

"During the pandemic, we often saw people panic when they were instructed to go straight home after testing positive for COVID-19," Martin remembered. "They didn't have the supplies they needed to quarantine for 14 days. We started creating little boxes with food and other basics to send home with people, so they could get through the first few days until they could get everything sorted out. This project is along those same lines."

Sometimes patients need something more than a diagnosis. They need relief to get through this moment. "One of the nicest things about this program is that it was an unsolicited project started by members of the community for the community," said Martin.

EBCH CEO Patti Banks agrees: ***"Someone saw a need and found a way to fill that need. It truly was a blessing."***

Those interested in helping with the Blessings Backpacks program can donate money or materials, as well as help assemble backpacks. For more information, contact Jodi Martin at [jmartin@ebch.org](mailto:jmartin@ebch.org) or **218-365-8739**.

**If you are in need of a backpack, stop by the EBCH Emergency Department and let staff know. We would be happy to share this blessing with you.**