

STOPPING FAMILY VIOLENCE – OUR RESPONSIBILITY
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Tragically, we live in a world where one out of three women will be physically or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. Every two and half minutes, somewhere in the US, someone chooses to commit sexual assault.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This year WPS Health Insurance has helped develop a partnership to increase the awareness of everyone's role and responsibility to stop family violence. WPS Health Insurance is working with the State Medical Society, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, and the Wisconsin Women's Council to call on businesses and health care providers to establish policies that help identify needs and services for victims of intimate partner violence.

As a significant employer, WPS takes very seriously its responsibility to do all we can to create a safe, secure and healthy work environment for our almost 5000 employees. As a good corporate citizen, WPS knows that this epidemic of violence can and must be confronted as a major health concern for all of us.

We work directly with health care providers across the nation, and we are embarking on an initiative to encourage them all to develop a routine screening practice for patients. We are providing health care providers with tools for screening, safety planning and referrals to community resources when their patients are identified victims of abuse. With over 1/3 of women and 15% of men reporting physical or sexual abuse by a friend or partner, it is truly of monumental proportions. WPS is committed to working with health care providers to reduce those startling numbers.

Each time a doctor or nurse asks a patient about family violence, he or she is taking a critical step towards helping victims. Many of the victims who are murdered had previously sought medical help for injuries due to the violence. By training providers about routine screening for family violence, and providing information and referral, they can make a huge difference for battered women and their children – and in some cases can save lives. The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence can assist health care professionals with this training and implementation.

WPS is asking our employees to help promote the screening strategy, to talk to their care providers by sharing with them a domestic violence screening card specially created for providers. We are working with the new partnership on additional strategies to urge community-wide attention to the issue and the importance of family violence as a health care concern.

We ask that all businesses in our community join us in this call. Domestic Violence is an important issue for businesses. People who face abuse away from the workplace often find the abuse follows them to work. Not only is family violence a security and liability

concern for businesses, there are serious performance and productivity losses that hurt the bottom line. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that the annual cost of lost productivity is over \$1.8 billion and more than 8 million paid workdays lost. The health care costs to victims and the health care system is huge – over \$4.1 billion a year. Thirty-seven percent of the women who seek care at the emergency room are abused by an intimate partner, and victims of violence experience twice the rate of depression, substance abuse, injuries, and suffer chronic illnesses at record numbers. Taking action by improving corporate policies to help victims of abuse, businesses will see higher morale, reduced absenteeism, and improved job retention, health and performance.

But WPS's commitment reaches well beyond the economic factors and is driven more by the true feeling of doing what is right. And we could be saving lives at the same time.