

MEDIA RELEASE

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Protect Wichita Firefighters Initiative Receives Visionary Award from Kansas Hospitals

(Sept. 22, 2025) — The Kansas Hospital Association was honored to recognize the Protect Wichita Firefighters Initiative as this year's winner of the <u>Donald A. Wilson Visionary Award</u>.

The Kansas Hospital Association established this award to recognize individuals who have made an outstanding, innovative contribution to health care delivery, health care financing or other initiatives to improve the health and clinical outcomes of their community. The Donald A. Wilson Visionary Award provides KHA members with the opportunity to recognize individuals who have truly been agents for change in their community and in the hospital industry.

The Protect Wichita Firefighters Initiative was led by individuals at four organizations, Ascension Via Christi Hospitals of Wichita, St. Francis Campus (Keisha Humphries, Brett Grizzell, MD, Andrea Gallardo, Maxey Wigging and Colleen Pate), City of Wichita (Council Member Becky Tuttle), Wichita Firefighters (Chief Tammy Snow) and the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 135 (President Ted Bush).

This initiative directly addresses a critical and emerging challenge in health care: the alarmingly high rates of occupational cancer, heart and lung diseases among firefighters. Data from the International Association of Fire Fighters highlights that occupational cancer accounts for up to 70 percent of line-of-duty deaths for career firefighters, representing a significant health disparity for these vital community members. This initiative provides a much-needed solution to a population historically underserved by comprehensive, targeted preventive care.

By offering specialized, early detection health screenings and ongoing nurse navigator support, the program improves clinical outcomes by identifying issues at their most treatable stages. This commitment to early detection and preventive care for a specific high-risk population showcases visionary leadership in shifting the paradigm of health care from reactive treatment to proactive wellness.

The Protect Wichita Firefighters initiative demonstrates close collaboration at multiple levels and has significant potential for wide application. It is already serving as a blueprint for other communities to address critical occupational health needs. Members of the Kansas Hospital Association recognized the Protect Wichita Firefighters Initiative during the KHA Awards Luncheon on Friday, Sept. 5, at the KHA Annual Convention in Wichita.

The Kansas Hospital Association is a voluntary, non-profit organization existing to be the leading advocate and resource for members. KHA membership includes 242 member facilities, of which 124 are full-service, community hospitals. Founded in 1910, KHA's vision is Optimal Health for Kansans and Kansas hospitals.

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