

Safe Communities: Applauds increase in Badgercare's behavioral health rate as a critical step to addressing Wisconsin's drug overdose epidemic

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Safe Communities Applauds Increase in Badgercare's Behavioral Health Rate as a Critical Step to Addressing Wisconsin's Drug Overdose Epidemic

State of Wisconsin's Leadership to Expand Treatment Access "will save lives"

Safe Communities of Madison and Dane County applauded today's announcement that Wisconsin will increase Badgercare's behavioral health reimbursement rate.

The measure will expand treatment access - the next major challenge to addressing the state's opioid overdose epidemic.

Effective January 1, 2018, Wisconsin Medicaid will increase reimbursement for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment. This policy change will increase the maximum allowable fee for each covered outpatient service, and simplify the current rate structure, moving from five different fees per service to two fees per service. The new rates are competitive with border-state Medicaid programs and Medicare reimbursement, supporting growth of the Wisconsin provider workforce, according to Governor Scott Walker's announcement today.

"This measure will significantly improve access to treatment for people with opioid

and other substance use disorders”, said Skye Tikkanen, Drug Poisoning Prevention Manager at Safe Communities. “We anticipate that through this increase, additional providers will be available for those Wisconsinites who access their health care through the Badgercare system. Safe Communities prioritizes increased access to substance use and mental health services as one strategy to fight the opioid overdose epidemic. Through this rate increase it is clear that the State of Wisconsin shares these priorities. This policy change will save lives.”

Expanding treatment access is the next major challenge to addressing the state’s opioid overdose epidemic, said Tikkanen. Wisconsin’s launch of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, state prescribing guidelines introduced to prevent diversion for non-medical use, and passage of HOPE agenda to expand naloxone were critical. Now, said Tikkanen, the single most effective option available to address the statewide opioid addiction epidemic is to increase access to treatment.

“One factor limiting treatment availability is a shortage of providers trained to treat patients with complex needs, including mental illness and history of trauma that often underlies addiction. This Medicaid rate increase for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment helps address the challenge of recruiting and retaining providers in this field”, she said.

Lack of available therapists can drive up wait times for appointments, discouraging people with addictions from seeking treatment when they are ready to take that step. People are dying of overdoses while awaiting appointments. A member of Safe Communities’ Parent Addiction Network noted that her loved one’s first scheduled appointment happened to fall on the day of his funeral: he died from an opioid overdose six weeks after the appointment was scheduled.

Safe Communities of Madison and Dane County is a nonprofit injury coalition that build partnership with people and organizations to save lives, prevent injury and make our community a safer place. Safe Communities Sustaining Partners are: Lifesaver level (\$20,000 and above): Dane County, City of Madison and American Family Insurance; Hero level (\$10,000 and above): Rich and Amy Steffen; Fire Fighters Local 311; First Responder level (\$5,000 and above): SSM Health and Mad City Police Hockey.