

Medical College of Wisconsin: Funding to expand Wisconsin Child Psychiatry Consultation Program proposed

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Legislation would increase state funding by \$1.5 million per year

Milwaukee, Feb. 27, 2019 – The Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) and Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin (CHW) commend State Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) and State Representative Jim Steineke (R-Kaukauna) for circulating legislation to expand Wisconsin’s Child Psychiatry Consultation Program (CPCP) with an additional \$1.5 million per year of support. The proposed legislation would expand the program from select geographic regions of the state to be a statewide asset.

The CPCP provides primary care providers with free-of-charge pediatric mental health consultations for their child and adolescent patients struggling with mental health concerns. The program provides three main benefits:

1. Immediate access to mental health for patients who would otherwise be unable to see a child psychiatrist in a reasonable amount of time

2. Long-term education to providers on mental health prevention and treatment
3. Referral support to identify additional mental health resources that may be available in a community

More than 250,000 kids in Wisconsin have access through the current coverage of the CPCP and enrolled providers. If a statewide expansion occurs, all Wisconsin kids would have potential access.

“We wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to Sen. Darling and Rep. Steineke for their longstanding commitment and support of this crucial program, which dates back to 2013,” said Jon Lehrmann, MD, Charles E. Kubly Professor and Chair in Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at MCW. “Expanding the CPCP will help ensure thousands more children and adolescents in Wisconsin have greater access to mental health care.”

“Children’s Hospital strongly backs any effort to support or expand the CPCP program statewide to better meet the mental health needs of our community. The CPCP has been an incredible source for our pediatricians to provide mental health support in a timely and effective way to the kids we care for,” said Smriti Khare, MD, president of Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin Primary Care.

Wisconsin, along with most other states in the nation, is experiencing a severe shortage of child psychiatrists. Below is some information to illustrate this.

- A total of 48 out of 72 counties in Wisconsin do not have a child psychiatrist.
- There are only approximately 135 child psychiatrists in the state.
- In 2018, Mental Health America ranked Wisconsin ranked 50 out of 51 in youth access to mental health care for children who have had an episode of major depression.
- Children commonly must wait 6 months to 2 years to get in to see a child psychiatrist in Wisconsin.
- Nationally, there are about 8,000 child psychiatrists, with a need for approximately 32,000.
- Currently 59 percent of psychiatrists are age 55 or older and nearing retirement.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2013), approximately 20 percent of U.S. children and adolescents ages 9 to 17 have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder.

Because the psychiatry shortage has become so acute, primary care providers – such as pediatricians and family physicians – have by necessity become the front-line mental health care providers. However, many of these clinicians do not receive extensive mental health care training.

Since providing CPCP services in 2015, more than 670 providers have been enrolled and the program has provided over 2,500 consultations, and 94 percent of providers who have received consultation have reported satisfaction with the program. The CPCP has even provided consultations while children are still in their doctor's offices, and providers hear back in 15 minutes 90 percent of the time. This free and immediate service is in stark contrast to waiting months to see a specialist.

The CPCP was modeled after the Charles E. Kubly Child Psychiatry Access Project, a private, philanthropic program developed by MCW and CHW via a generous gift from the Charles E. Kubly Foundation. Sen. Darling and Rep. Steineke originally authored the legislation creating the CPCP under 2013 Wisconsin Act 127. Act 127 provided an initial level of funding at \$500,000 per year, and the program was later expanded under the 2017-19 biennial budget to \$1 million per year. Sen. Darling and Rep. Steineke's legislation will now provide funding to cover all 72 Wisconsin counties.

MCW and CHW are thankful for the proposed legislation by Sen. Darling and Rep. Steinke. Both institutions look forward to working with the legislature and Governor Tony Evers on enhancing mental health access for kids.