

Gov. Evers: Announces \$2 million investment to support mental and behavioral health services for underserved Wisconsinites

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 27, 2021

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EAU CLAIRE — Gov. Tony Evers today announced a \$2 million investment to support mental and behavioral health services for underserved communities, including Hmong and Southeast Asian Wisconsinites, through the Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Association, Inc. (WUCMAA). Today's investment will enable WUCMAA to continue and expand its work statewide through its Project Resiliency initiative.

WUCMAA is a nonprofit coalition of member organizations that works statewide to support community development in underserved populations. WUCMAA will be contracted to provide specific services, including increased communication regarding suicide prevention resources, creating dialogues and trainings around suicide and mental health needs, and adopting culturally responsible training and curriculum for health providers, as well as establishing a Hmong Mental Health Advisory Council and Statewide Hmong peer-run "warmline."

"WUCMAA has been doing critically important work in communities across our state—especially as the past year and a half has been difficult for so many, particularly communities that have long been underserved," said Gov. Evers. "I am glad today to join WUCMAA in this important work to expand the Project Resiliency initiative, combat the cycle of trauma, address disparities in health, and ensure Hmong and Southeast Asian communities have the resources and opportunity to recover from this pandemic and all the mental and behavioral health challenges that have come with it."

Since arriving in the United States as political refugees nearly 50 years ago, Hmong communities have been an important population in Wisconsin with nearly 60,000 Hmong individuals across the state. Still, from higher rates of unemployment and poverty to discrimination and violence, Hmong people, especially younger populations, face significant challenges. The coronavirus pandemic acutely exacerbated these challenges for Hmong Wisconsinites, as they experienced a notable increase in racism and xenophobia that targeted Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. According to WUCMAA, traumas predating the pandemic have been compounded by recent hateful rhetoric and actions, resulting in mental and behavioral health crises that have led to depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide in Hmong and Southeast Asian communities. In response, WUCMAA launched the Project Resiliency initiative to create a central hub of resources for Hmong and Southeast Asian mental and behavioral health for individuals, families, and providers.

“WUCMAA is thrilled to receive this funding to elevate and continue the important statewide mental health work of our member organizations,” said WUCMAA Interim Executive Director Mang Xiong. “We are grateful for the continued support and partnership with the Governor’s office and DHS to serve the needs of our Southeast Asian community in Wisconsin.”

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) will contract with WUCMAA to provide specific culturally sensitive services beyond the department’s capacity and expertise while providing periodic financial and programmatic reports to DHS.