

Medical College of Wisconsin, UW School of Medicine and Public Health: Statewide partnership awarded \$3 Million to address health disparities in Wisconsin

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The Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) and the UW School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) are partnering on an initiative to improve health equity in Wisconsin. MCW's Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment (AHW) and the SMPH's Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP), statewide health funders based at Wisconsin's two medical schools, have announced a joint three-year, \$3 million grant to launch an expansive new statewide partnership that will study, measure and recommend solutions for health inequities across the state of Wisconsin.

With rising health inequities, it is critical to understand where health disparities exist in order to develop targeted interventions to eliminate them. This project will allow collaborators to leverage existing statewide data on a wide range of clinical and healthcare topics from participating health systems and health insurers as well as geographic data to develop reports and action tools aimed at improving health outcomes statewide. The information will help researchers identify and understand where gaps in care exist. Examples could include identifying areas and populations that can benefit by focusing on maintaining healthy blood pressure, colorectal cancer screening, or depression screenings during pregnancy. The data will inform interventions and recommendations for improvement.

"This new collaboration brings tremendous synergy and capacity to extend the reach of both WPP and AHW across our state. We anticipate benefits to people in

both rural and urban areas because we know that disparities exist in multiple settings in Wisconsin and have deepened even more because of the pandemic,” said Richard Moss, PhD, Senior Associate Dean at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and chair of WPP’s Partnership Education and Research Committee.

The grant award from the statewide health funders will support researchers at the two medical schools in partnering with the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ), a membership organization comprised of 35 health systems, over 300 medical clinics and more than 200 dentists, and the Wisconsin Health Information Organization (WHIO), a consortium of 20 health insurers. The collaborators will research and recommend solutions to inequities in accessing and delivering care in Wisconsin.

“By supporting a collaboration of this magnitude – between academic centers, health systems, and payers – we aim to bring forward new solutions that will reduce inequities in health and positively impact those who have been underserved and marginalized,” said Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH, director of the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment and senior associate dean at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Under this new partnership, a comprehensive team will be led by Maureen Smith, MD, PhD, MPH, Professor of Population Health Sciences and Family Medicine and Community Health at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and Joan M. Neuner, MD, MPH, Professor of Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and will bring diverse areas of expertise in health equity, health services, health system data, epidemiology, and rural and urban health to rapidly translate data and findings into solutions aiming to transform how people experience health care and, ultimately improve health outcomes in Wisconsin.

This initiative builds upon previous research supported by WPP, led by Smith in partnership with WCHQ, which showed Wisconsin health disparities by race and ethnicity, health insurance and geography. The addition of MCW, Marshfield Clinic and WHIO will allow the collaborators to expand their understanding and extend their reach across the state to ensure the health needs of both urban and rural populations are represented.

The long-term goal of the project is to reduce health disparities and improve health in Wisconsin through partnering academic institutions with health systems, payers, and communities to build sustainable systems that measure, monitor, and reduce

disparities through best practices and evidence-based innovations.

For more information visit ahwendumment.org and med.wisc.edu/partnership.