

# Security Health Plan: Invests in youth-driven program designed to improve health and well-being of central Wisconsin teens

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WAUSAU – “One of my priorities is for the child who does not have a voice, who can’t take care of him or herself in an abusive situation,” said Carolyn Nash, M.D., Pediatrics, Marshfield Clinic Health System. “As a pediatrician who works with suspected victims of abuse and neglect, I view positive relationships with health care providers as key to their well-being.”

Dr. Nash is also a member of the Providers and Teens Communicating for Health (PATCH) Central Wisconsin Community Advisory team. PATCH is a youth-driven program that works to improve the health and well-being of teens. There are PATCH organizations throughout the United States, including three in Wisconsin. Dr. Nash works with the Central Wisconsin chapter based out of Wausau.

Security Health Plan of Wisconsin, Inc., will invest \$1,000 in PATCH Central Wisconsin as part of its Employee-Driven Corporate Giving grant program. Dr. Nash nominated PATCH for the grant in 2020. Each month Security Health Plan awards a \$1,000 grant to a different charity or organization that is nominated by a Marshfield Clinic Health System employee. Employees are encouraged to nominate organizations making a positive difference in the community.

PATCH works with schools and organizations to educate, engage and empower young people to take control of their health. They do this by cultivating a panel of 10-12 high school students between the ages of 14 and 18, who will work with the organization for a year-long commitment as a teen educator. The panel of teens are trained to lead educational workshops with their peers and with health care professionals. Each year a new panel of teen educators is formed, with some returning for a second, or even third stint.

“At PATCH we believe that health care practices, programs and policies should be developed with young people – not for them,” PATCH Central Wisconsin program coordinator Paula Neiweem said. “Our teen educators are our youth experts. They are responsible for cultivating open and honest dialogue with their peers and health care providers about adolescent health.”

Neiweem said the teen educators will present their workshop in groups of three upon request to school groups, organizations and classes. The workshops focus on three main areas: relationships, promoting healthy relationships between teens and their health care provider; rights, what rights teens have in regards to their health care and what they can do on their own and what they need parental or guardian permission for; and responsibilities, how they can take control of their own health care.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Neiweem said the workshops were held in-person at schools and events like a mental health wellness day or health day. Now the workshops are all held virtually which has enabled the group to have a further reach. She said there are five Central Wisconsin school districts represented with teen educators, but any school in the region can utilize their services.

“When you’re a teen you need to know ways you can help yourself when it comes to health care,” Neiweem said. “Sometimes teens aren’t comfortable talking with a parent about the changes they are going through with puberty, but having some of that information come from a peer – one of our teen educators – can be more impactful.”

Neiweem said the grant from Security Health Plan will be used to cover costs for

their training expenses and to pay for workshop materials.

She said the organization enriches the lives of teens throughout Central Wisconsin.

“Making sure teens are getting the health care they need and deserve is so important,” she said. “And these teen educators ensure health care providers understand what they are looking for and enable them to better provider for the needs of the teens in our area.”

To learn more about PATCH Central Wisconsin go to [www.wipatch.org/-patchcentralwisconsin](http://www.wipatch.org/-patchcentralwisconsin). If interested in hosting a workshop with a school group, class or organization, or to get involved with the community advisory team, email PATCH Central Wisconsin program coordinator Paula Neiweem at [centralwi@wipatch.org](mailto:centralwi@wipatch.org).