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Dept. of Health Services: Gov. Evers, DHS announce grants to expand child telepsychiatry services, access to behavioral health care

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Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), today awarded $2.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to five organizations to increase access to child telepsychiatry services. The one-year grants of $500,000 each will support projects focused on recruiting and retaining psychiatrists and other behavioral health professionals and deploying technology to connect more providers with patients through virtual visits.

“We’ve made critical investments in mental and behavioral health over the last year because we know that kids across Wisconsin need these additional mental health supports perhaps now more than ever,” said Gov. Tony Evers. “These grants are an important part of our work, as telehealth helps reach kids with the specialized care they need when and where they need it so they can live their best, healthiest lives.”

The organizations receiving funding include:

- **Essentia Health-St. Mary’s Clinic, Superior** serving Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Sawyer, and Washburn counties.
- **Children’s Wisconsin, Wauwatosa** serving Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties.
- **Kenosha Community Health Center, Kenosha** serving Kenosha County.
- **NorthLakes Community Clinic, Iron River** serving Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Eau Claire, Iron, Langlade, Oconto, Polk, Price, Sawyer, and Washburn counties, as well as the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac Courte

Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin.
- **Professional Services Group, Kenosha** serving Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Rock, Walworth, and Washington counties.

"Now more than ever, families need behavioral health care for their children, but significant gaps in access to this treatment continue to exist," said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. "These grants will reach rural, suburban, and urban communities across Wisconsin, paving the way for more children to receive necessary services."

All health systems, hospitals, and clinics providing behavioral health care were invited to apply for these grants through a competitive request for applications process that opened in March and closed in May. Twenty-three applications were received, and providers whose applications most aligned with the goals of this funding received grants.

These grants are part of Gov. Evers' broader efforts to strengthen Wisconsin's behavioral health system at a critical moment. Over the past 12 months, Gov. Evers has invested $113.2 million of ARPA funding to increase access to mental health and substance use services, enhance programs and resources for children in need, and bolster the behavioral health workforce. These investments are described below.

Mental Health and Substance Use Services

Increased Block Grant Investments – $46.6 million
These funds supplement Wisconsin's existing share of the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant and the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant. Funds have been distributed to more than 100 counties, tribal nations, and agencies across the state, allowing them to support and expand mental health and substance use programs and services that meet the unique needs of their communities.

National Guard Mental Health(link is external) – $5 million
This investment allows the Wisconsin National Guard's Comprehensive Wellness Office to expand access to services for every member of the Guard, from counseling to stress reduction programs to suicide prevention services, and more.

Milwaukee Mental Health Emergency Center (MHEC)(link is external) – $4.5 million
MHEC serves adults, teens, and children by providing around-the-clock crisis services, as well as opportunities to further inpatient, residential, outpatient, and peer support services, while also serving as an economic driver in the community.

Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Association, Inc. (WUCMAA)(link is external) – $2 million
This investment supports mental and behavioral health services for underserved communities, including Hmong and Southeast Asian Wisconsinites, to help WUCMAA continue and expand its work statewide through its Project Resiliency initiative.

Children and Students

Get Kids Ahead Initiative(link is external) – $30 million
Nearly every K-12 school in the state will be able to use these funds to provide direct mental health care, hire and support mental health navigators, provide mental health first aid and trauma-based care training, or provide family assistance programs – whatever kids need.

Children's Wisconsin Services(link is external) – $5 million
Children's Wisconsin is expanding its pediatric walk-in behavioral health clinic, the only one in the state serving children and youth, as well as starting a pediatric psychology residency program in partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin.

University of Wisconsin (UW) System Mental Health Supports(link is external) – $5 million
UW System will provide telehealth counseling, support, and intervention to help students access mental health services with a goal of increasing availability and shortening wait times. The system will also fund post-masters and post-doctoral counselors to allow recent graduates of mental health programs to receive supervision for licensure while providing counseling and therapy services at a lower cost.

Telehealth Expansion(link is external) – $5 million
This investment includes the $2.5 million referenced above, and makes telehealth services, including mental and behavioral health services, more accessible through hospitals and health systems and establishes neighborhood access points at food pantries, homeless shelters, libraries, long-term care facilities, community centers, and schools for people with limited access to technology and reliable internet

service.

Workforce Development

Educational Pathways to Treatment Professions(link is external) – $9.1 million
UW-Whitewater will expand funding for the Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants Program and build programs that make it easier for students committed to behavioral health careers to get the necessary education and training to move from college to certification and into clinical practice. UW-Whitewater will work with the UW System and Wisconsin College Technical System to implement curriculums statewide. UW-Whitewater will further partner with nearly 200 ;behavioral health providers to expand access to patient services through support for more treatment trainees and their supervisors.

Cultural and Linguistic Competency – $1 million
Funding will be awarded to organizations with projects designed to train the behavioral health workforce to identify people from underserved populations in need of mental health and substance use services, and to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services.