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For Immediate Release

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Community Health Centers Highlight Impacts of State Funding on Patient Access to Oral Health Care and Behavioral Health Treatment

Madison, WI – At today’s Senate Committee on Health hearing, four local Community Health Center leaders offered testimony in support of Senate Bill 59 (SB 59). The bill would increase funding for the Community Health Center State Grant that supports access to care for underserved populations across Wisconsin.

During the hearing, Community Health Center leaders highlighted clinic responsiveness to meeting local community needs. The State Grant is a flexible funding tool which allows Community Health Centers to rapidly assess and address priorities, from COVID-19 response to expanding behavioral health treatment.

Brian Ahlgren, Chief Financial Officer at NorthLakes Community Clinic, shared, “Since 2016, we have increased our patient panel by 7,000 Wisconsinites and added new services such as our Recovery Program helping state residents with opiate and other addictions. The state grant allows us to adapt to evolving patient and community needs, such as funding our school-based oral health program and expansion to WIC offices, nursing homes, and childcare centers. This program supports nearly 17,000 residents, mostly children, with their oral health needs and education.”

“In 2020, we adapted quickly to meet the needs of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, including implementing a COVID-19 vaccination services. To date, we have vaccinated our staff and provided the initial vaccine dose to half of our patients who are 65 years and older. With your support, this increase to the State Grant would allow us to broaden access to Substance Use Disorder treatment and develop additional pathways for patients to receive more intensive mental health services, or increase oral health care to over 2,000 people in rural communities” advocated Joanne Holland, Chief Financial Officer, Access Community Clinics.

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) represents all Federally Qualified Health Centers in Wisconsin and appreciates the opportunity to showcase Health Center success stories at the Committee hearing, while underlining the value of additional state investment to address unmet needs. SB 59 would increase funding by \$2 million per year, distributed across all 17 Wisconsin Health Centers which serve patients from every single Wisconsin county.

SB 59 was introduced on February 4, 2021, with bipartisan support from 24 state lawmakers. A similar bill received a hearing in the Assembly Committee on Health in 2020 prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association greatly appreciates the bipartisan support for an increased state investment in Health Centers and the communities they serve. We look forward to supporting our member Health Centers as they work to meet the needs of their patients and their communities.

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