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Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health Reacts to Governor's Budget

MADISON – Last week, Governor Tony Evers outlined his 2021-2023 Budget Proposal. He included a wide range of initiatives that get to the heart of making a difference in Wisconsinites' lives. The following includes a summary of items we're celebrating at the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health for the positive difference they can make in the health and lives of Wisconsin women and girls.

- **Healthy Women, Healthy Babies Proposal:** Wisconsin has the disgraced reputation of being one of the worst states to have a black child and raise a black family. Among the many alarming disparities that plague our state, black babies born in Wisconsin are 3x more likely than white babies to die before they reach the age of 1. Governor Evers' budget dedicates \$30 million to address and disrupt racial disparities in maternal and child health. To support healthier pregnancies and births, his priorities include increasing funding for doulas, expanding postpartum Medicaid coverage to one full year post-birth, and providing grants to Black-led organizations working to advance black women's health. We're especially excited to see Governor Evers include a specific expansion of Medicaid coverage for postpartum women from the current 60 days to a full year following the birth of a child.
- **BadgerCare Expansion:** For the past six years, former Governor Scott Walker and legislative Republicans have rejected *billions of dollars* in federal funds available to Wisconsin under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Governor Evers' budget will expand BadgerCare to ensure health care coverage for nearly 100,000 Wisconsinites while saving taxpayers an estimated \$634 million. Expanding BadgerCare means that low-income, uninsured people - who are predominantly women and children of color - will have access to affordable healthcare coverage and have the ability to receive necessary care, services, and support. Expanding BadgerCare also means that we can invest our saved state dollars in other important initiatives that benefit Wisconsin women - like the Healthy Women, Healthy Babies proposal listed above.
- **Prohibiting the Shackling of Pregnant & Laboring Women in Prisons:** Although widely regarded as an assault on human dignity as well as an unsafe medical practice, incarcerated women are still routinely shackled during pregnancy and childbirth. Shackling pregnant prisoners endangers the health and safety of both the mother and the fetus, and is almost never justified by the need for safety and security for medical staff, the public or correctional officers. Through his budget, Governor's he recommends limiting the use of restraints on pregnant and postpartum people in correctional facilities.
- **Improving Wisconsin's Public Health Infrastructure:** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for increased investment in our state's public health infrastructure, which has been chronically underfunded in the past. The Governor's budget continues the administration's pandemic response by bolstering Wisconsin's health infrastructure with an investment of more than \$400 million in hospitals, local health departments, and other public health initiatives. This would be one of the largest public health investments in Wisconsin in at least 20 years and builds on over \$2 billion in federal Coronavirus Relief Funds that our administration has dedicated to Wisconsin's response and recovery from COVID-19.

- **Improvements in Telehealth Coverage:** The flexibility to use telehealth for regular doctor's visits, urgent appointments, and other medical needs has never been more important. In this time of COVID-19 and widespread uncertainty, Wisconsinites have struggled to maintain reliable access to affordable and safe healthcare services. That's why Governor Evers has continued to find new ways to reduce barriers to telehealth. His budget includes proposals that will prohibit insurers from denying telehealth coverage if the service would otherwise be covered in-person, bar insurers from charging patients extra for telehealth visits, and prevent insurers from imposing limits on telehealth services. His budget also includes an investment in statewide broadband to make telehealth a true option for rural communities.
- **Childcare Investments:** Since the onset of the pandemic, one of Wisconsin's most apparent issues has been dramatically magnified: the need for affordable, quality childcare. Across our state, women are being pushed out of the workforce to shoulder the majority of family caregiving responsibilities. Unfortunately, our childcare system has not adapted to the specific needs of COVID-19, nor has it shifted to accommodate both parents working outside the home. To alleviate this ongoing structural problem, Governor Evers' budget will invest \$140 million in new funding toward an initiative that will prioritize childcare equity, affordability, and accessibility.
- **Funding for Caregivers:** Caregiving is a critical component of our society and our loved ones' lives. Across the nation and in Wisconsin, caregivers tend to be underpaid and overworked women. Governor Evers has recognized this unsettling reality and included several provisions in his budget to reduce the financial stress on people who serve as caregivers. Some of his proposals entail investing \$240 million to raise nursing home rates, allocating \$77 million to support personal care services, expanding the Family & Medical Leave Act, and increasing funding for aging and disability resource centers - including those on native land.
- **Key Democracy Reforms:** And finally, recognizing how difficult it has been to advance any positive, proactive policies related to women's health, safety and economic security in Wisconsin, we are extremely grateful that the Governor's Budget takes important steps to mitigate the negative impacts of past voter suppression efforts and gerrymandering in our state. By directing the Department of Transportation to implement automatic voter registration, modifying voter ID requirements such as requiring the UW system to issue student IDs that comply with voter ID laws, extending absentee voting time frame, and requiring the legislature to go by the Fair Maps Commission recommendations when redrawing district boundaries, the Governor's Budget makes necessary recommendations to ensure voters can be heard through the ballot and through the legislative session.

The Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health will continue to advocate for these and other important budget items that are critical in achieving our vision: *Every Wisconsin woman - at every age and every stage of life - is able to reach her optimal health, safety and economic security.*

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The mission of the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health (WAWH) is advance comprehensive women's health in Wisconsin by engaging, educating, empowering and mobilizing individuals and organizations.

To learn more about WAWH, visit our website: www.supportwomenshealth.org