

# WISCONSIN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION

Serving Wisconsin Community Health Centers



# WISCONSIN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

LAWMAKER UPDATES & RESOURCES

OCTOBER 2021

WPHCA is proud to serve Wisconsin's 17 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) also known as Community Health Centers (CHCs). Community Health Centers around the state have been deploying every tool available to continue providing care to patients throughout the pandemic. This newsletter includes information on Community Health Centers' priorities, resources, and stories from patients and clinics.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to [WPHCA](#) with any questions or to request additional information and constituent support to identify primary care providers. Find your local clinic [here](#).

[Visit WPHCA Website](#)

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT COMMUNITY

# HEALTH CENTERS IN WISCONSIN?



BUDGET RECAP



TELEHEALTH



CELEBRATING  
STATE GRANT  
CHAMPIONS



COVID-19 RECOVERY



ADVOCACY -  
POSTPARTUM  
EXTENSION FOR MA  
PROGRAM



UPDATED HEALTH  
CENTER DATA

## State Updates

### Co-Sponsorship Opportunities

#### Wis-MAC Veterans Legislation

On October 14, a bipartisan group of lawmakers circulated LRB 2266/1 for co-sponsorship. This bill would create new pathways for veterans to provide care in Wisconsin, after discharge from the armed forces.

When medically-trained service members and veterans transition to civilian life, their military healthcare training and hand-on patient care experience does not easily translate into comparable certifications and licenses required by the civilian healthcare profession. This is most evident in healthcare roles where state licenses are required to practice, such as Registered Nurses, and other clinical care practitioners. As a

result, many veterans and service members are left unemployed, underemployed, or leave the healthcare field altogether.

The Wis-MAC program is modeled after the award winning Virginia MACC Program. It is a pathway for returning veteran clinical care providers, including military medics and corpsmen, to work under supervision in their field while they obtain appropriate education and civilian licensure in the State of Wisconsin. Enacting Wis-MAC legislation would enable not only Community Health Centers but other health care entities, such as hospitals, to hire a skilled workforce and provide career pathways for veterans as medical professionals.

[Please consider signing on as a cosponsor of LRB 2266/1 by October 28.](#)



## **Community Health Centers Support the Extension of Medicaid from 60 days to 1 year Post-Partum**

Currently, women who qualify for Medicaid because of pregnancy are only covered up to 60 days following the birth of their child or post-partum. The 2021-2023 biennial budget approved an additional 30 days of coverage pending approval of a waiver submitted to CMS, but many mothers need care beyond this coverage window. SB 562/AB 592, championed this session by Senator Ballweg and Representative Loudenberg, would extend coverage for a full year post-partum.

[Please consider signing on to this bill today.](#)

## **BIENNIAL BUDGET RECAP**

Lawmakers advanced the ball on several of WPHCA's budget priorities, including

providing a \$1 million annual funding increase for the Community Health Center State Grant, which is shared among the 17 Community Health Centers in Wisconsin. However, several priorities such as protecting the 340B Drug Pricing Program, strengthening Medicaid through extended post-partum coverage, and advancing a Community Health Benefit waiver to address the social determinants of health for Medicaid enrollees, remain unaddressed.

## [WPHCA'S 2021-2023 BUDGET RECAP](#)

### Top Budget Priorities

- ✓ **Increase to the State Community Health Center Grant:** WPHCA advocated for a \$2 million annual increase to the State Community Health Center Grant and successfully received a \$1 million annual increase in the budget, approximately an 18% increase over current State funding.
- ✓ **Broadband infrastructure investment to ensure reliable, affordable access to high-speed internet:** Broadband investments include over \$125,000 in new funding to expand access to high-speed internet across the state, with additional investments through federal recovery funds.
- ✗ **Ensuring fair protections and ending price discrimination for entities such as Health Centers that participate in the 340B Drug Pricing Program that supports affordable medications for patients.** Not included in state budget.
- ✗ **Improving access to dental care through licensing Dental Therapists.** Not included in the state budget. Lawmakers did include a 40% rate increase for Medicaid dental services at private clinics to incentive serving low-income patients.
- **Strengthening and preserving the Medicaid program including expanding post-partum eligibility to one year.** The budget, pending application for and approval of an 1115 Medicaid Waiver, would extend coverage from the current 60 days to 90 days post-partum.

### Additional Priorities

- ✓ **Expanding behavioral health and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) services, including the focus on school-based services and additional support to increase access for populations such as students and veterans:** Several investments include Medicaid rate increases for Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Recovery services, Medication-Assisted Treatment, and an additional \$7 million for school-based mental health services.
- **Implementing childcare initiatives that would afford families of Health Center staff and patients new options for early childhood education.** Significant investments in the caregiving infrastructure were made through federal relief.
- ✗ **Investing in a Community Reinvestment Fund, community-based equity initiatives, and a Community Health Benefit Waiver which would provide funding for efforts to expand Community Health Worker models and advance work to address social determinants of health such as housing and food insecurity.** Not included in state budget.
- **Streamlining and increasing capacity for licensing, with a focus on dental and behavioral health professions.** The budget includes minor increases in staff capacity for processing health profession licenses plus funds the final phase of technology updates for the state's licensure application system upgrade.

# TELEHEALTH AT COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

On August 11, WPHCA facilitated a virtual telehealth briefing for policymakers and staff. This briefing highlighted the experiences from four Community Health Centers that provide care across both rural and urban settings. Panelists discussed use of telehealth for chronic disease management, oral health, and behavioral health, including Substance Use Disorder recovery and treatment.

Telehealth provides flexibility for patients and supports workforce efficiencies, such as deploying a therapist across multiple school settings and reducing travel time between sites. Providers emphasized the need for continued coverage and reimbursement for telehealth including audio-only care across all payers.

[A recording of the briefing is available here.](#)

**OPPORTUNITIES TO SECURE & ADVANCE TELHEALTH**

ENSURE UNNECESSARY PROVIDER BURDENS AREN'T ADDED



ADDRESS LACK OF RELIABLE HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY



ADVANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION & TRAINING



SHARE INFORMATION ON WHAT WORKS



CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION

## Oral Health

Since 2008, Community Health Centers have tripled their dental capacity to answer the call of Wisconsinites who are living without oral health care. Over 172,000 people received dental services at Community Health Centers in 2019. However, there is a great unmet need for dental care in our state for both children and adults. No single policy change or funding shift will resolve this complex issue. Instead, a multi-pronged approach is needed to address workforce issues, funding, and more. This session, WPHCA is pleased to support two bills that would make progress in addressing oral health gaps. Both of the bills below passed the Senate this session with bipartisan, unanimous votes. Neither has received an Assembly hearing to-date.

[AB 402/SB 392 – Certification of Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries \(EFDAs\)](#) and [SB 181/AB 169 – Licensure of Dental Therapists](#), would allow members of the dental team, including dentists and dental hygienists, to practice at the top of their license. Passing both bills will contribute to delivering more efficient, high quality patient care not only in clinics but also at other sites, such as school-based clinics. Community Health Centers often see patients whose oral health needs are complex and untreated, and the community need frequently outweighs the available clinical resources. These bills are critical tools to increasing efficiency and addressing oral health access gaps in the state.

## CELEBRATING STATE GRANT CHAMPIONS

National Health Center Week is always an exciting time for Community Health Centers across the nation to celebrate innovations and achievements, as well as show appreciation to their staff and patients. This year, Wisconsin Community Health Centers had an extra reason to celebrate as the Legislature included an increase to the Community Health Center State Grant in the 2021-2023 budget.

The Community Health Center State Grant provides flexible funds to help Health Centers make significant impacts in every community they serve. These improvements include increasing access to oral health

care, particularly for vulnerable populations, continuously reinvesting in innovative quality improvement activities, broadening access to substance use disorder treatment and mental health services, and improving access to preventive care and chronic disease management.

This significant investment in Community Health Centers provides an approximately 18% increase over previous funding.

Community Health Centers are also able to use this grant to address social determinants of health, which improves the potential for patients to move from Medicaid to private insurance.



Senator Marklein & Representative Novak at Access Community Health Centers



Senator Ringhand & Representative Loudenbeck at Community Health Systems, Inc



Representative Katsma at Lakeshore Community Health Care



Representative Goyke at Progressive Community Health Centers



Representative Duchow at Sixteenth Street

Throughout August, Community Health Centers met with lawmakers that helped advance the State Grant accomplishment, including co-sponsors of the original bill and legislative leadership. Lawmakers were honored with “State Grant Champion” awards, recognizing their role supporting the funding increase.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Over the course of this pandemic, Community Health Centers have continuously flexed their innovative muscles to balance three priorities: 1) the health and safety of staff and their families; 2) the immediate health care needs of patients; and 3) the health and economic wellbeing of the Community Health Center and the broader community. While doing so, Community Health Centers have:

- Met the primary care needs and ensured the safety of their patients. The majority of Community Health Center patients face additional barriers to and disparities in accessing health care, such as housing and food insecurity. Most patients also belong to groups disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in both exposure and adverse outcomes.
- Forged strong local partnerships and provided outreach, education, resources related to COVID-19 and integrated new services such as COVID-19 testing and vaccinations throughout their communities to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Nearly a year and a half later, Wisconsin's Community Health Centers continue much of this work, while at the same time remaining open and flexible to the developing needs of their patients and communities.



- 67,708 patients tested for COVID-19
- 11,285 patients tested positive for COVID-19
- 67.4% of patients who tested positive are from historically marginalized populations and communities



- 72,690 COVID-19 vaccinations provided
- 53% of vaccinations were for patients from from historically marginalized populations and communities



- Over 160,000 Telehealth Visits provided

[Read more](#)

## Federal Updates

### Community

Community Health Centers need infrastructure funding to expand capacity, build new sites,

Health Centers are advocating to keep **\$10B for capital funding** and **\$6.3B in primary care workforce funding** in the reconciliation bill.

renovate existing buildings, and add exam rooms for additional behavioral, dental, and vision health care services.

Health center staff are weary from their work on the front lines. Any loss in Community Health Center staff will exacerbate chronic primary care workforce shortages. Funding for the Teaching Health Center GME and Nurse Corps programs will bolster the primary care workforce by expanding the pipeline of future clinicians.

Community Health Centers are advocating to keep \$10 billion in infrastructure funding for CHCs and \$6.3 billion for primary care workforce programs in the Build Back Better Act.

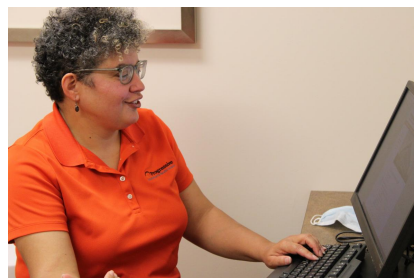
## Additional Federal Priorities

While capital and workforce funding remain top priorities, Community Health Centers are also eager to see protections for the 340B Drug Pricing Program and permanent telehealth policy for Medicare enrollees. WPHCA has endorsed the CONNECT for Health Act, bipartisan legislation that would allow clinics to permanently provide telehealth services as distant sites and be paid at the in-person rate. WPHCA is also seeking co-sponsors for the PROTECT 340B Act, which would support bar price discrimination from payers and Pharmacy Benefit Managers seeking to share in drug savings intended for patients and clinics.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS IN THE NEWS



Come Alive October Five Encourages



'A heart for the community':



Dr. Ramallo's impact in Milwaukee's Latino



## MKE Residents to Vote

Milwaukee Health Services, Inc held an all-inclusive public health event called Come Alive October Five. As people get their check-ups they can get help registering to vote.

## North Side doctor keeps her focus on her patients

Since she began working at Progressive, Dr. Tully has participated in and led programs focused on such chronic illnesses as hypertension and diabetes, which are prevalent on the North Side.

## community during COVID-19

Dr. Jorge Ramallo from the Sixteenth Street Clinic in Milwaukee has played an important role in the health of Milwaukee's Latino community.

# THANK YOU!

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Did you miss our last Quarterly Update? Find the [June 2021 Lawmaker Update here](#) and all [Quarterly Newsletters](#) and [Press Releases here](#).



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