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Projects to increase access and build workforce for mental health and substance use services

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MILWAUKEE — Gov. Tony Evers, together with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), today announced $14.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to directly support youth mental health services, as well as new behavioral health providers entering the workforce. Together, these programs will expand access to vital services and address the shortage of mental health providers across Wisconsin.

Children's Wisconsin will use $5 million of the investment to enhance youth mental health services and support a new pediatric psychology residency program. The remaining more than $9 million will be administered by the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UW-Whitewater) to help bolster Wisconsin's mental health and substance use services workforce.

"Every Wisconsinite should have access to the quality, affordable healthcare they need when they need it, especially our kids who have been struggling perhaps now more than ever," said

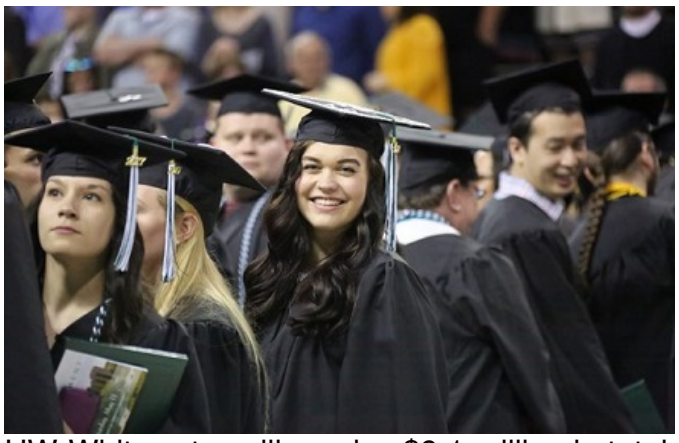
Gov. Evers. "These investments today build on the work we've been doing to expand mental health services in our state, including by providing funding for our kids and schools through the Get Kids Ahead Initiative, and will help bridge critical gaps in care for kids and families all across our state to help them lead their full and best lives. From expanding behavioral health career pathways in our UW System to enhancing mental health services at Children's so our kids can get the care they need, together, we're building a behavioral health system that works for everyone."

Children's Wisconsin will receive a total of $5 million, including approximately $2.3 million to support its pediatric Craig Yabuki Mental Health Walk-In Clinic and approximately $2.7 million to start a pediatric psychology residency program in partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin. The clinic is the only walk-in behavioral health clinic in the state serving children and youth, and since opening in February 2022 has seen the need to expand its services to meet demand.

"Improving access to urgently needed behavioral health services for children and youth is important to ensure families can get mental health care when it matters most," said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. "These investments take action now to address the urgent need of the current youth mental health crisis."

The additional funding will enable Children's Wisconsin to expand the walk-in clinics' workforce and hours, and provide additional services, including bridge therapy service. The bridge clinic will assist youth until they can access a higher level of care or a long-term treatment plan with an established provider. Through the new psychology residency program, Children's Wisconsin will be able to better retain graduate students in its psychology training program, instead of them leaving to complete their required residency somewhere else.

"We know kids can't be truly healthy without mental health," said Peggy Troy, president and CEO of Children's Wisconsin. "Our Craig Yabuki Mental Health Walk-In Clinic, the first program of its kind in Wisconsin, bridges a critical gap in care for kids experiencing a mental health crisis. We truly appreciate this support from the governor and DHS. It will help enhance services at the clinic and increase the workforce through the psychology residency program so more kids and teens can have access to this care when they need it most."



UW-Whitewater will receive $9.1 million in total and will use $7.6 million to expand funding for

the Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants Program and $1.5 million to build educational pathways.

The Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants Program supports placements for professionals with a training license who need hours of observed practice for their full license. This funding expands the program begun under Gov. Evers' leadership as a part of the 2019-2021 state budget and provides funding for eligible behavioral health providers to expand and support trainees. Trainees are able to provide clinical care under supervision, and these supervised hours are a requirement for clinicians to become fully licensed behavioral health treatment providers. The funding includes:

- $5 million that will be awarded to nearly 200 behavioral health provider agencies to hire and supervise at least one qualified treatment trainee—a master's level counselor, marriage and family therapist, or social worker—seeking to obtain the hours of observed practice needed to become licensed in their field. The funding will be split between agencies serving adults and agencies serving children.
- $2 million for $5,000 stipends each year for up to 200 qualified treatment trainees in unpaid two-year internship positions.
- $620,000 to expand the network of agencies that sponsor qualified treatment trainees, including agencies located in behavioral health professional shortage areas and agencies that serve uninsured and underinsured patients as well as Medicaid members.

The Qualified Treatment Trainee Grants Program funding will be made available through a request for applications process managed by UW-Whitewater. The application period will open soon.

UW-Whitewater will also expand educational pathways for students committed to behavioral health careers. The funding includes:

- $1 million for a pilot program managed with UW-Whitewater at Rock County to make it easier for students to move from an associate degree in human services to a bachelor's degree in social work. UW-Whitewater will work with the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System to implement these curriculum enhancements across the state.
- $500,000 to develop a post-master's certificate in treating people dually diagnosed with both mental health and substance use disorders.

"We have had the privilege of developing this program with guidance from the DHS leadership team, input from a state advisory committee, and skillful program coordination from our staff. We are thrilled with this significant investment in the trainee program," said Jessica Smith,

UW-Whitewater Center for Inclusive Transition, Education and Employment director and co-founder. "We look forward to our continued partnership with the state as we use these funds to expand our focus on addressing diversity and equity barriers through new financial support opportunities for clinical graduate students, create new educational pathways for trainees, and support dual diagnosis trainings."

The strategies announced today are part of a series of investments funded by parts of ARPA to transform Wisconsin's behavioral health system.