



News from:
The N.E.W. Mental Health Connection
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The Connection receives \$1 million grant to improve youth mental health
Coalition receives funding from Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment

The Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection has been awarded a \$1 million grant to improve the mental health of youth in Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet counties.

The grant award, announced this month, will fund The Connection's "Healthy Teen Minds" initiative over the next five years. The goal of the project is to reduce the rate of depression among teens by implementing strategies that focus on prevention, promoting resiliency and coping skills among youth, and interventions for struggling teens.

"This is an amazing opportunity for us to really change the landscape around youth mental health and go further upstream to prevent mental health problems before they start," said Beth Clay, executive director of The Connection. "We are so grateful to our funders – and the Medical College of Wisconsin – for being visionaries and innovators and making behavioral health a top priority in Wisconsin."

The Connection is one of 10 community coalitions across the state that are entering the second phase of a \$20 million behavioral health initiative funded by the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Endowment at the Medical College of Wisconsin. The funding is part of AHW's initiative focused on improving community behavioral health.

In the fall of 2015, The Connection, in partnership with Winnebago County Health Department, ThedaCare, Ascension, Catalpa Health, and Housing Coalition of the Fox Cities, responded to an AHW call for proposals for community coalitions seeking to address behavioral health. The Connection was selected for the ambitious eight-year project, which represented a new strategic direction for the AHW Endowment.

"This is the first time we have funded an entire year devoted to the learning and skill-building process," said Cheryl A. Maurana, PhD, senior associate dean and director of the AHW Endowment, which sits within the MCW School of Medicine. "The new approach reflects AHW's shift from grant maker to change maker, and we're very impressed with the results so far. Many of the partners developed valuable skills that will help them succeed as they implement projects in their communities."

The Connection's project team, along with nine other community coalitions throughout Wisconsin, recently completed a year-long learning period, along with identifying community needs and developing an implementation plan. The project started its five-year implementation phase this month. The final two years of the project will focus on sustainability to ensure the project's strategies live on beyond the end of the grant.

"It's been an exciting year of learning, studying our population and planning our project," said Wendy Magas, Healthy Teen Minds project coordinator. "This project is going to involve our entire community working together and we are thrilled by the abundance of support we've received so far from social service agencies, public health, mental health providers, school districts and other sectors."

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“We know that half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14. And we know we have a very caring and committed community that wants to raise strong, resilient and healthy kids. Together, we will make a difference so no child has to suffer from untreated or under-treated mental health challenges.”

The Healthy Teen Minds Project focuses on prevention and environmental supports with the expectation of positively influencing the lives of all teens in the tri-county region. For example, the project is organizing a cohort of six local high schools that, in the coming year, will be adopting “Sources of Strength,” an evidence-based suicide prevention and comprehensive wellness program that builds resiliency in kids by fostering positive peer relationships and connections to trusted adults.

“Our local Youth Risk Behavior Survey data tells us that 25 percent of our high school students are experiencing mental health challenges, so there is a clear need,” said Rachel Podoski, Healthy Teen Minds project evaluator. “We expect to see that number drop over the course of the project as we roll out strategies and scale them up in our region. All of the work we are doing is informed by research, data and the local needs of our community.”

Other strategies include adopting social-emotional learning in elementary schools, supporting and expanding school-based mental health initiatives, and a teen sleep campaign to raise awareness about the importance of adolescent sleep. An early success of the project is the recent launch of MyConnectionNEW.org, a new mental health service navigation website that includes a complete listing of all mental health and substance use services and supports in the region, making it easier for tri-county residents to connect to services.

About N.E.W. Mental Health Connection

The Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection is a nonprofit membership organization that serves as the backbone to a collective impact movement creating, disrupting, and continuously improving the mental health system-of-care in Northeast Wisconsin. The Connection brings people, agencies and providers together to drive innovative systemic change.

About the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment

The MCW School of Medicine’s Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment works to catalyze health improvement in Wisconsin and was created by funds generated from Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin’s conversion to a for-profit corporation. The Endowment’s Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program funded the new awards as part of its continued work supporting partnerships between academics and community health and non-profit organizations for urban, rural and statewide health improvement projects in Wisconsin. Since 2004, the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment has invested almost \$200 million in more than 300 research, education and community health initiatives. More information on individual projects is available online: <http://www.mcw.edu/Advancing-Healthier-WI-Endowment.htm>

About the Medical College of Wisconsin

With a history dating back to 1893, The Medical College of Wisconsin is dedicated to leadership and excellence in education, patient care, research and community engagement. More than 1,200 students are enrolled in MCW’s medical school and graduate school programs in Milwaukee, 56 medical students enrolled at MCW-Green Bay, and 26 students matriculated to MCW-Central Wisconsin in 2016. MCW’s School of Pharmacy will open in 2017 or 2018 with an initial class size of 60 students. A major national research center, MCW is the largest research institution in the Milwaukee metro area and second largest in Wisconsin. In FY2015, faculty received more than \$158 million in external support for research, teaching, training and related purposes. This total includes highly competitive research and training awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Annually, MCW faculty direct or collaborate on more than 3,200 research studies, including clinical trials. Additionally, more than 1,500 physicians provide care in virtually every specialty of medicine for more than 525,000 patients annually.

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