

This session Wisconsin has an opportunity to recommit to fair financing of vital family and community supports. With smart investments, we can transition to more preventative, cost-effective services that produce better outcomes and deliver long term dividends for our state.

When we enable our behavioral health, child welfare and human services sector to more rapidly respond to the demand for community-based, in-home, and intensive services, we increase community safety, reduce the need for crisis response, and change the trajectory for individuals. Ensuring people receive the right service, when and where they need it, will have a positive impact on our workforce, our children and families, and our economy. It is with that knowledge in mind that WAFCA recommends the following priorities for the 2025-26 legislative session.

Investing in Prevention and Early Intervention

WAFCA supports key investments that empower families and strengthen the human services ecosystem across the private and public sector. We know that family economic supports, such as workforce housing, high quality childcare, EITC and extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage directly impact family stability. Research has shown that as states increase their investment in economic supports for families, child welfare system referrals are reduced. Early intervention priorities include:

- Evidence-Based Home Visiting
- Family Resource Centers and Early Care Mental Health Consultation
- Sustainable School-Based Mental Health

Strengthening Services and Support for Children

We do not currently have a system capable of responding timely and sufficiently to the needs of children and their families. This results in delayed or denied access to services and sometimes placement outside of the state. For Wisconsin's children with particularly intensive needs including complex trauma, cognitive and developmental delays, and persistent mental health challenges, the inability to respond with the right resource can exacerbate their conditions as they move from care setting to care setting awaiting an opening in a service that can best serve them. Supporting children and families with complex needs means:

- Financial and Service Supports for Kin and Foster Care and Expansion of Intensive Foster Care
- Foundational Funding for Residential Treatment and Youth Crisis Stabilization
- Creating a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility
- Ensuring Equity in Crisis and Community Support Program Services across the state
- Resources for Youth Justice Reforms and Returning 17-Year-Olds to the Youth System

Growing Our Future Workforce to Support Mental Health and Wellbeing

The current mental health crisis is also an opportunity to expand career pathways for a wider array of caregivers and helping professions and to recognize the range of professionals who make critical contributions to the wellbeing of individuals, children, and families. Behavioral health and human services careers will become more attractive and more competitive as we continue to evolve our technology and operational infrastructure to increase worker satisfaction and reduce burnout and turnover. Priorities include:

- Increasing Medicaid Rates, especially for Behavioral Health Providers Disproportionately Serving MA Clients
- Grants to Support Qualified Treatment Trainees
- Private Insurance and Medicaid Funding for Peer Specialists and Qualified Treatment Trainees
- DSPS Capacity to Support Licensed Professionals