



NEWS RELEASE

May 11, 2023

CONTACT: Kathy Markeland, kmarkeland@wafca.org

608.257.5939

WAFCA Recognizes Children's Mental Health Awareness Day – Calling for Action

May is Mental Health Month and in coming weeks communities, advocates and providers will continue to raise awareness regarding the need to grow a continuum of care that supports mental well-being across the lifespan. Today the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA) and member organizations are highlighting the needs of Wisconsin's children in a special way as we recognize Children's Mental Health Awareness Day and call for continued state action.

WAFCA is a statewide network of non-profit and for-profit providers of human services and mental health and substance use treatment services. For more than 40 years we have supported our member agencies in their missions to improve the lives of individuals, families and children across Wisconsin.

The tragic and compelling data regarding the mental health of Wisconsin's children is well documented. As a community of providers, our members engage daily with the challenges that Wisconsin's children are facing and while the struggles are significant, we also know that resilience and recovery are real and that we can significantly impact our communities on a population health level when we invest in prevention and early intervention.

"Wisconsin has a tremendous opportunity in this current state budget to move upstream and initiate supports for our children sooner. Investment in prevention and early intervention will deliver long-term dividends for our state and our families," stated Kathy Markeland, WAFCA Executive Director.

In addition to emphasizing the value of investment in basic needs such as workforce housing, high quality childcare, and extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage, WAFCA's network of providers are continuing to call for a stronger state commitment to equitable funding for the continuum of supports for Wisconsin's children and families including:

- **Continuing to expand prevention services:** The research on early brain development establishes unequivocally the value of supporting our families, especially through the early years. Wisconsin must invest sustainable funding in evidence-based programs like family resources centers, home visiting services, early care mental health consultation, and school-based mental health initiatives that improve community connectedness and enable families to access services before experiencing a crisis.
- **Focusing on our children with complex needs:** Children and families that are experiencing more complex challenges deserve special consideration and attention, yet our continuum of supports for these families is inadequate. From mentors to peer specialists to therapists to foster care to

respite and residential services – we simply don't have the workforce, nor sufficient funding streams to help our families access the right service at the right time. The legislature should support increased funding for kin and foster caregivers, stable funding for youth crisis stabilization and residential treatment programs, and full funding for Medicaid crisis and Community Support Program services to ensure that children can access support where they live, whether in a rural or urban community, and aren't forced to go out of state for services.

- **Growing a future workforce to support mental health and wellbeing:** The mental well-being of our children rests on an array of supportive adults wrapping around them through their families, schools, and communities. This budget is an opportunity to create career pathways for a wider array of caregivers and helping professions. This includes expanding Medicaid reimbursement for peer specialists, increasing support for qualified treatment trainees, and delivering sustainable Medicaid payment rates for the professionals and agencies that are committed to caring for our Medicaid eligible children.

“This is a pivotal budget for Wisconsin. Our state legislature has the power to use the current state surplus to make impactful investments in the health and well-being of Wisconsin’s children. As mission-driven organizations, we are committed to continuing to partner with children and families and our policymakers to build the future our children deserve. It’s time to move from awareness to action.”

###

WAFCA is a statewide network of non-profit and for-profit providers of human services supporting member agencies in their missions to improve the lives of individuals, families and children in Wisconsin. Our member agencies provide a wide array of prevention and supportive services such as foster care, in-home support, counseling, and mental health treatment. We advocate for our members and the more 200,000 individuals and families that they impact each year.