

Partners of WHA  
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Community Health Education Report

Wisconsin's 2023 the Year of Mental Health Initiatives Review

Governor Tony Evers declared 2023 The **Year of Mental Health** during his State of the State address, explaining mental and behavioral health is a crisis affecting children, families and the workforce in Wisconsin. In the 2023-25 budget proposal, he recommended \$500 million in investments to expand access to mental health services across the state.

There has historically been a reluctance to embrace mental health issues and openly address them. Changing perspectives and the culture around behavioral health is a slow process despite a growing awareness of the need for such interventions. In part, this is reflected in the 2023-25 budget allocating \$50 million for mental health initiatives of the proposed \$500 million.

Funding for school-based mental health services increased from \$10 million to \$30 million over the biennium. This allows for the school-counselor-to-student ratio to be reduced from 378 to 1 to the American School Counselor Association recommended 250 to 1. This ratio is generally followed across the US. This has resulted in the ability to screen and identify children with anxiety and depression at rates never seen before. This early identification and subsequent intervention with treatment results in better outcomes for the students.

The ongoing challenge of providing treatment and support to those with mental and behavioral health issues still exists. The "Madison Model" or Program of Assertive Community Treatment is a successful community support program that allows people with severe mental health illness to live safe and productive lives. These programs are expensive to run and 72 counties and 11 federally recognized tribes are struggling to thrive or nonexistent. The proposed \$40 million in the budget was cut from the final bill.

Wisconsin's 988 Wisconsin Lifeline program is a great success. It is a suicide prevention program and is one of the most effective 988 campaigns in the country. Since the July 2022 conversion to the three-digit number, more than 92,000 Wisconsinites have used the number and benefited from the professional help and support. A \$17 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is supporting the ongoing work of the 988 Wisconsin Lifeline Program.

More than one in five pregnant and postpartum mothers in the US deal with depression and anxiety disorders. Unfortunately, 75% of these women will not receive treatment, according to Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance. In response to this need, Us 2 Behavioral Health Care in Appleton formed a new perinatal mental health training program for care providers across Wisconsin from medical professionals to case workers and substance abuse counselors.

A \$310,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services will allow this program to reach more health care workers and train them in perinatal mental health outreach.

Budget funding of \$200,000 will provide mental health services to farmers and farm families. This will allow farmers and their family members to access in-person counseling services from a participating mental health provider in their local area at no cost.

Efforts to increase mental health care providers within Wisconsin are supported through \$30 million to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for services provided in hospital behavioral health units; seven million dollars for the psychiatry and behavioral health residency program at the Medical College of Wisconsin to support the recruitment and training of psychiatry and behavioral health residents; two million dollars to establish a telemedicine crisis response pilot program in order to provide faster and more efficient care.

While the mental health care needs of Wisconsinites continue to outnumber the programs and available services, the above initiatives and mental and behavioral health services are impressive in intention and scope.