



2021-22 Legislative and Biennial Budget Priorities

WAFCA represents private providers of human services across Wisconsin that work in concert with government partners to support thriving families and communities. Over the past year, our members stepped up to the challenges of 2020 by rapidly pivoting to continue vital behavioral health, child welfare and social services for the families in our care, while also renewing our commitment to the critical work of advancing equity and inclusion within our agencies, our sector and our nation.

In this new session as we turn toward a focus on recovery, rebuilding and reform, our policy agenda embraces the opportunities and challenges of this moment committing to policies that:

- Center on Equity – challenging systemic disparities
- Focus on Prevention First – beginning with basic needs and universal supports
- Invest in Improving Access – ensuring right service, right time
- Follow the Evidence – aligning practice with research and data
- Value the Private/Public Partnership – leveraging the collective strength of our sector

Working within this framework, there are critical budget and policy issues that WAFCA will be monitoring, supporting in coalition and leading to advance this session.

Putting Family First

WAFCA supports key investments that lift families and strengthen the human services ecosystem across the private and public sector. Our members are “all in” on proposals to increase state and federal support for prevention and early intervention with families. We know that family economic supports, such as childcare and the Earned Income Tax Credit directly impact family stability. Research has shown that as states increase their investment in economic supports for families, child welfare system referrals are reduced.

While these investments in basic needs are critical, as Wisconsin continues to move forward with the implementation of policies to align with the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), WAFCA is acutely aware of the need to sustain a broad continuum of care. Therefore, in addition to supporting investments in prevention services, WAFCA looks to support high quality out-of-home resources, services for families with complex trauma, treatment options for youth who are currently being served out of state and resources inside and outside of school for adolescents facing serious emotional and mental health challenges. These more intensive services for children and their families rely on Medicaid and other systems beyond DCF. WAFCA will support opportunities in this session to support DCF, DOC, DPI and DHS initiatives that work collectively to build a high-quality continuum of services statewide. Specific areas of focus include:

- **FFPSA Prevention Services.** Advance access to evidence-based and supportive services for parents, caregivers and children by supporting the DCF proposal to invest *\$12 million annually in FFPSA Prevention Services and enable providers to pivot services toward more community-based supports and to improve the continuum of care in all regions of the state.*

WAFCA is a member association that works to improve the lives of 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. WAFCA represents over 50 child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field and advocates for the more than 200,000 individuals and families that they serve each year.

- **Qualified Residential Treatment Providers (QRTP).** Support successful FFPSA implementation by establishing DCF authority to certify congregate settings as QRTP settings while allocating \$600,000(GPR) to *fund required nursing assistance and training resources for providers of residential services for children and youth* with complex trauma and mental health needs in Wisconsin's child welfare system.
- **Early Childhood.** Support the recommendations of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council to *strengthen and support families at the earliest stages of a child's development*, including \$30 million for the childcare workforce, \$7.5 million for Family Resource Centers and \$12.6 million for mental health and behavioral supports in childcare settings.
- **Foster and Relative Caregivers.** Support *increases in kinship care and foster care rates* to continue growing family-based and local community options for children who cannot safely remain at home.
- **Youth in Foster Care.** Support youth in foster care as they transition to adulthood by *removing barriers to obtaining a driver's license*.
- **Raise the Age.** *Return 17-year-olds to the youth justice system* and adopt meaningful reforms to increase community-based resources for system-involved youth.

Moving Forward on Mental Health

The pandemic generated high levels of stress and anxiety that further strained a mental health delivery system that was already facing workforce shortages and access issues. The adoption of Medicaid expansion to extend coverage for childless adults up to 138% of the federal poverty level will address some insurance coverage gaps that were exacerbated by job losses in 2020. More importantly, adopting Medicaid expansion will result in the infusion financial resources to support increased rates for mental health and substance use treatment and other investments to expand mental wellness throughout the state. Specific mental health investments should include:

- **Medicaid mental health and substance use treatment rates.** Support increases in Medicaid mental health and substance use treatment rates to *improve capacity of providers to serve Medicaid eligible children and families*. WAFCA member agencies serve a disproportionate share of the Medicaid eligible population. It is difficult to compete for qualified therapists when an agency's primary purchaser is Medicaid.
- **Medicaid-funded day treatment services for children and adolescents.** Support a significant increase in the Medicaid day treatment rate, which has not been raised since 2009. More than 80% of children in day treatment programs are enrolled in Medicaid. *Day treatment services are a critical community-based option to help children stabilize at home with their families* thus preventing out of home placement and/or hospitalization.
- **School Mental Health Collaboration Grants and School Mental Health Staff.** Support the DPI proposal to increase annual collaboration grant funding to \$10 million to expand school mental health services to more students across the state. In addition, support **new investments in school-based professionals** including school social workers, psychologists, counselors, and nurses to improve social and emotional well-being for all students and educators.
- **Clinical Supervision Grants for Mental Health Treatment Trainees.** Expand the investment in clinical supervision grants to *double the current grants* from \$500,000 annually to \$1 million.

- **Licensure of Mental Health Professionals.** *Approve new staff positions and invest in technology advances at DSPS to address delays and inefficiencies in the process for licensing behavioral health practitioners.*
- **Telehealth.** Mandate health plans to *provide parity coverage of telehealth services* that are functionally equivalent to in-person services.

Adopt Regulatory Reforms

- **Training and Safety in Youth Settings.** Improve training tools and support greater safety in youth congregate care settings by *permitting the use of video recording in common areas.*
- **Liability Reform.** The pandemic revealed disparities between liability protections for health/long term care providers and providers of youth services. *Adopt parity in liability protections* to reduce risk exposure for providers who serve youth with complex care needs.
- **Recognize Agency Accreditation.** Under FFPSA, more providers will become nationally accredited, which requires operational and financial compliance standards that often exceed state licensing standards. *Require DHS and DCF to provide regulatory oversight relief to accredited entities* by recognizing successful national accreditation when renewing out-of-home care licenses and clinic licenses.

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