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Public health projects leap forward through Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program

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Community health initiatives have long been a commitment of our institution, and the Medical College of Wisconsin is fortunate to have a new, well-funded instrument for improving public and community health. We recently approved 23 community-academic partnership projects statewide through the College's Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program (Program).

This program is a component of the endowment fund established at the Medical College following Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin's conversion to a stock insurance corporation. The proceeds of that conversion were dedicated to improving public health and distributed to the state's two medical schools for implementation of programs to accomplish this goal. The mission of the Medical College's Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program is to improve the health of Wisconsinites by funding community-medical school projects that emphasize prevention and health promotion.

In the Program's first funding cycle, the 23 accepted projects received nearly \$4 million in total funding. They were selected from nearly 200 proposals requesting more than \$40 million. These urban, rural and statewide projects involve more than 100 Wisconsin community and Medical College of Wisconsin partners and cover a

broad range of health promotion and disease prevention activities.

Directed by Juli Kaufmann, the Program has adopted a health improvement model that is anchored in the state health plan and has four major components—reduction of Wisconsin's major health risks; reduction of health disparities through a focus on specific populations; reduction of major causes of death and disability; and systemic change through building system capacity, policy development, and advocacy.

At the heart of the Program is the community-academic partnership paradigm, which I consider essential to sustained health improvement. Collaboration between College and community partners capitalizes on the strengths that each possess. Broad public participation guided the formation and development of the Program and remains vital to its success. Additionally, health care professionals serve many roles in planning, coalition-building, and project implementation around the state.

The Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program is a key part of the expansion of the Medical College's mission to advance public and community health by building strategic partnerships that will have the greatest impact on our state's most critical health needs. Our commitment to community health improvement is supported by a strong infrastructure

and carried out by dedicated faculty and administrative leaders.

I work closely with Cheryl A. Maurana, PhD, senior associate dean for Public and Community Health and professor of Family and Community Medicine, who provides overall leadership for the College's community health initiatives. She coordinates community health priorities across departments, centers, and programs, fostering collaboration, technical assistance, and advocacy.

Dr Maurana, along with Ms Kaufmann and her staff, has been instrumental as the first cohort of projects funded through the Program receives orientation to the Program and ongoing technical assistance. Of the 23 projects, eight are major implementation projects that each received \$450,000. They are as follows:

- The Bilingual Community-based Chronic Care Institute aims to develop a model of care that will reduce adverse health effects of the chronic conditions (asthma, diabetes, and obesity) most prevalent in Milwaukee's Hispanic community.
- The Church-based Health and Wellness Program aims to reduce health risk factors related to cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes in African Americans through education interventions in church communities.
- The Community Health Advocate

Model Program aims to change risky behaviors through the work of health advocates at five Milwaukee public housing sites.

- The Culturally-Appropriate Weight Loss Intervention for Overweight Latino Children promotes lifestyle changes and counseling for overweight Latino children in Milwaukee.
- Health Care Can Change From Within: A Sustainable Model for Intimate Partner Violence aims to prevent domestic violence through the creation of a training program to help medical clinics and emergency departments establish intervention strategies.
- Partner Up for Superior Health aims to reduce obesity in northern Wisconsin counties by modifying social norms to support good nutrition and increase physical activity.
- The Riverwest Health Initiative is a grassroots coalition that will

conduct a community health assessment with the goal of improving the health of residents in Milwaukee's Riverwest neighborhood.

- The Wisconsin Injury Prevention Coalitions supports the development of community-based injury prevention coalitions statewide to reduce the burden of intentional and unintentional injuries.

Fifteen other projects received awards for planning, ranging from about \$18,000 to \$42,000. To learn more about all of these projects and the partners they involve, I encourage you to visit the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program pages on the Medical College of Wisconsin Web site at www.mcw.edu/healthierwisconsin.

Approved projects receive ongoing evaluation, which includes further public participation as part of the program's commitment to a fair, accessible, and transparent process.

Evaluation will be used to identify opportunities for improvement and will aid in tracking the progress of each project.

Moving forward, the program is encouraging resubmission of unfunded proposals that were novel and innovative but did not receive approval in the first cycle. The development of new proposals and partnerships is also encouraged as we expect to announce a new request for proposals later this year.

The Medical College of Wisconsin has extensive experience implementing public and community health programs built by enduring collaborations. At the core of these successful initiatives lie the partnership principles and the health improvement model that also guide the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program. I am confident that our continued stewardship of these landmark funds will indeed lead to a healthier Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Medical Journal

The mission of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* (ISSN 1098-1861) is the official publication of the Wisconsin Medical Society and is devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in Wisconsin. The managing editor is responsible for overseeing the production, business operation and contents of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*. The editorial board, chaired by the medical editor, solicits and peer reviews all scientific articles; it does not screen public health, socioeconomic or organizational articles. Although letters to the editor are reviewed by the medical editor, all signed expressions of opinion belong to the author(s) for which neither the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* nor the Society take responsibility. The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is indexed in Index Medicus, Hospital Literature Index and Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.

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