Advocates Urge JFC to Support Increased Investment in Community Health Centers through the 2021-2023 Biennial Budget

Madison, WI – At today’s Joint Committee on Finance hearing, several Community Health Center advocates offered testimony in support of Health Center priorities. They highlighted a provision in Gov. Evers’ proposed budget, also the bipartisan Assembly Bill 66 / Senate Bill 59, that would increase funding for the Community Health Center State Grant by $2 million per year.

The State Grant is a flexible funding tool which allows Community Health Centers to rapidly assess and address priorities. Health Centers have used these funds to expand dental clinic capacity, deploy clinical pharmacy programs, and address acute mental health needs including Substance Use Disorder treatment, among other priorities. SB 59 / AB 66 has already garnered bipartisan support from over 30 state lawmakers, signaling the broad dedication to ensuring Community Health Centers can meet emerging needs.

At today’s hearing, Matt Gehri, Chief Financial Officer at Partnership Community Health Center, shared, “Without the State Grant, we would be unable to adapt to ever-evolving patient and community needs. Currently, it supports integrated behavioral health and Substance Use Disorder services, allowing us to serve 300 patients a month with acute behavioral health needs. We also use these funds to deploy nurse care management for our high-need patients, such as those with diabetes and hypertension. With increased investment, we could further extend services to individuals experiencing homelessness and expand our chronic disease care management efforts.”

“Family Health Center was able to use grant funds to help build our first dental clinic in Ladysmith in response to an emerging need for dental access, diverting expensive emergency room visits. Looking forward, a State Grant increase could, among other uses, help us to better address the dental care needs of Wisconsin’s veterans, the vast majority of which have no dental coverage. We are currently in discussions on a national pilot to improve access to oral health services for our nation’s veterans. An increase in the State Grant fund could greatly improve our success if we are chosen to participate in the pilot,” advocated Eva Scheppa, Director of Health Services, Family Health Center of Marshfield.

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) represents all 17 Federally Qualified Health Centers in Wisconsin and appreciates the opportunity to showcase Community Health Center success stories at the virtual JFC hearing, while underlining the value of additional state investment to address unmet needs. State Grant funding has remained level at $5.49 million since 2009, while total patients served has grown by over 100,000 people. An additional $2 million annual investment could support 32,000 dental visits, plus provide Behavioral Health or SUD care to 3,000 patients.

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association greatly appreciates the bipartisan support for an increased state investment in Community Health Centers and the communities they serve. We look forward to supporting our members as they work to meet the needs of their patients and their communities, and urge members of the Joint Committee on Finance to provide a $2 million annual increase in the Community Health Center State Grant.

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