Hearing Scheduled on Bill Increasing Investment in Community Health Centers

Madison, WI – The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) commends Wisconsin lawmakers for recognizing the value and impact of Community Health Centers through a new bill to increase state investment in serving high-need communities. Senate Bill 59 was introduced by lead sponsors Senators Testin and Ballweg and Representatives Novak and Magnafici. It will receive a Senate Committee on Health Hearing on February 9, where four Health Center leaders will provide virtual testimony describing the potential impacts of increased flexible state funding. The bipartisan proposal is co-sponsored by 24 state lawmakers.

Community Health Centers have served on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to provide primary care and other services for patients while also launching testing and vaccination efforts. SB 59 would increase state grant funding for Community Health Centers by $2M annually, recognizing the critical work that remains to address the needs of vulnerable communities lacking access to care. Currently, State Grant funding accounts for only 4% of overall Community Health Center funding. This funding, which has remained stagnant since 2009, is one of the only flexible sources of funding for Health Centers, and a critical resource for proactively addressing unique community needs.

Over the last 10 years, Community Health Centers have increased the number of patients served (from 210,926 in 2008 to over 300,000 in 2019), with a marked increase in dental visits and Substance Use Disorder treatment. Today, 17 Community Health Centers provide care at nearly 200 service sites in Wisconsin, including school-based sites, mobile clinics, and brick-and-mortar locations in both rural and urban communities.

78% of Health Center patients in Wisconsin earn incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, facing multiple social and environmental factors that affect their health care needs and access to care. The state grant allows Community Health Centers to be flexible and fund services that directly benefit their unique communities. A $2 million annual increase in the State Grant would allow Community Health Centers to continue and strengthen current programs. For example:

- $1 million investment could support nearly 32,000 dental visits to low-income residents
- $1 million investment could support the work of 18 Behavioral Health/Substance Use Disorder Therapists providing access to critical care to over 3,000 patients

The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association greatly appreciates the bipartisan support for an increased state investment in Health Centers and the communities they serve. We look forward to supporting our member Health Centers as they work to meet the needs of their patients and their communities.

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