



Wisconsin Family Ties

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Contact: Joanne Juhnke, Policy Director – (608) 320-6165; joanne@wifamilyties.org

On Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day, Wisconsin Family Ties Urges Lawmakers to Protect Medicaid, Oppose the AHCA

Madison, WI – Wisconsin celebrates Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day on May 4, 2017, as proclaimed by Governor Scott Walker. While organizations and families come together to share stories of struggle and hope in the face of daunting mental health-related challenges, the U.S. House of Representatives has been careening toward passage of the American Health Care Act (AHCA), a bill that gravely threatens the Medicaid funding on which so many Wisconsin families rely for their children. In a deeply ironic scheduling twist, the House vote is currently scheduled to be held on Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day itself. Wisconsin Family Ties urges lawmakers to reject the AHCA and protect Medicaid for our children and youth with behavioral health needs.

“Every day, in our work with families across the state, Wisconsin Family Ties sees the ongoing struggles and unmet needs for children and families when it comes to mental health,” said Joanne Juhnke, Policy Director for Wisconsin Family Ties. “Across Wisconsin, one in five children experience diagnosable mental health issues, and we have a higher rate of major depression and suicide among our youth than the national average. If we gathered together all the Wisconsin children and youth who aren’t receiving the treatment and services they need, we’d fill Lambeau Field! In the midst of this ongoing crisis, Medicaid is absolutely central to the mental health and well-being of our children and families. The ACHA threatens to dramatically undercut the progress that Wisconsin is trying to make.”

Medicaid is the single largest funder of behavioral health treatment nationwide, and in Wisconsin, one in 3 children is covered by Medicaid/CHIP. Children with behavioral health needs are among the most vulnerable Medicaid recipients, representing 11 percent of the children on Medicaid but accounting for over a third of program expenditures for children. The AHCA would cut \$900 billion in Medicaid spending over a decade and require states to choose between a per capita cap or a block grant, either of which would propel Wisconsin onto a path of ever-increasing cuts to Medicaid eligibility, benefits, and provider payments.

Wisconsin’s 2017-19 biennial budget proposal contains several welcome new initiatives that rely on Medicaid funding, including ending the wait list for Children’s Long Term Supports (CLTS), and providing grants for school districts to form integrated mental health partnerships with community providers. One in four children currently waiting for supports under the CLTS

Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health

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Medicaid waiver have severe emotional disturbances; the restructuring under the AHCA threatens to once again leave families waiting for desperately-needed assistance. Meanwhile, Medicaid represents a critical funding stream for school districts to increase the number of students who receive mental health services, and the proposed School Mental Health Initiative could be compromised if the Medicaid funding mechanism for mental health therapies is undermined by the AHCA.

Juhnke concluded, “At a time when so many of Wisconsin’s children and youth, and their families, are facing mental health challenges, we should not even be considering inflicting such damage on the Medicaid system that supports them. Wisconsin Family Ties urges our state’s Congressional representatives to join us in opposing the American Health Care Act.”

Wisconsin Family Ties, Wisconsin’s family voice for children’s mental health, is a parent-run nonprofit organization serving families that include children with social, emotional, behavioral or mental health challenges. Founded in 1987, its mission is to enhance lives by promoting children’s mental health.

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