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For Immediate Release

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Governor Evers Signs Budget Increasing Investment in Community Health Centers

Madison, WI – Today, Gov. Evers signed into law a biennial budget that makes a historic investment in Wisconsin’s health care safety net. The 2021-2023 budget increases funding for Wisconsin’s Community Health Centers, also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers, by \$1 million annually through the Community Health Center State Grant.

State Grant funding has remained flat at \$5.49 million per year since 2009. Since that time, total patients served by Wisconsin’s Community Health Centers has grown by over 100,000 people. A bill to increase the State Grant was first introduced by Sen. Marklein and Rep. Novak in 2019, and an increase was also included in Gov. Evers’s 2021-2023 budget proposal.

Increased investment in the State Grant recognizes not only the role of Community Health Centers in providing primary care for patients across Wisconsin, but the unmet need for health services that many communities face, especially individuals living in poverty or with limited access to care. This includes unmet need for not only primary care, but behavioral health and oral health services. Today, Community Health Centers use these funds to expand dental clinic capacity, deploy clinical pharmacy programs, and address acute mental health needs including substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, among other priorities. The State Grant is a source of flexible, sustainable funding for Community Health Centers, allowing them to respond nimbly to local needs.

Throughout the session, advocates have focused on the need for increased state investment in Community Health Centers, which are innovative, community-oriented clinics providing care to residents in every single Wisconsin county. In 2019, this included primary care and other key services such as behavioral health, dental, and care coordination for over 300,000 patients at nearly 200 clinic sites. Over half of Community Health Center patients earn at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level, which in 2019 was \$25,750 for a family of four.

“This funding increase will help Community Health Centers reach deeper into their communities in every Wisconsin county and provide the wrap-around primary care services that patients need to reach their full health potential. Community Health Centers identify and meet the needs of underserved populations, whether through rapidly shifting to provide telehealth services, creating community gardens to make produce more accessible for patients, or developing partnerships with school districts to provide on-site behavioral health services. This funding increase will enable our members to plan new and expanded service lines with confidence. We appreciate this budget for recognizing the unique role that Community Health Centers play in meeting the need for underserved individuals across the state,” commented Stephanie Harrison, CEO, Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA).

WPHCA commends Gov. Evers for recognizing the unique roles of Community Health Centers in his budget proposal, and appreciates the leadership of Co-Chairs Marklein and Born, Sens. Testin and Felzkowski, and Reps. Novak and Loudenbeck for advocating for increased state investment in Community Health Centers through the biennial budget. WPHCA also thanks the more than 30 bipartisan lawmakers who have expressed their support for the increase. The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) is the association for Wisconsin’s 17 Community Health Centers.

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