



State of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Council on Mental Health
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Date: April 16, 2021
To: Co-Chairs, Senator Howard Marklein, Representative Mark Born and
Members Joint Committee on Finance
From: Wisconsin Council on Mental Health – Rick Immler MD Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rick Immler MD".

Subject: Support for BadgerCare Expansion in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Council on Mental Health (WCMH) is the statutorily authorized, Governor-appointed council whose function is to advise the Governor, Legislature, and State agencies on mental health policy and funding.

The WCMH requests that the Joint Committee on Finance support the current opportunity for BadgerCare Expansion. The benefits of BadgerCare expansion for Wisconsin citizens would include better access to care, including mental health treatment, and reducing unnecessary suffering and death. Expansion would also bring substantial economic gains by capturing our federal tax dollars for the benefit of Wisconsin citizens, reduce unnecessary costs that increase property taxes and support local healthcare. Politically, we would join almost 40 states, including many with conservative leadership, who have valued this benefit for their citizens. Some benefits would be:

Health and Well-being:

- The current Pandemic has been associated with a rise in overdoses, suicide and attempts. Stress combined with limited access to care are contributory. BadgerCare expansion provides better access to care for an estimated 90,000 Wisconsin citizens, nearly half of whom are uninsured.
- Two-thirds of the Wisconsinites who would receive coverage are parents or caregivers. Many Wisconsin children are covered by BadgerCare yet thousands of their parents whose incomes are near the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), do not qualify. Child health and well-being is intertwined with the health of the family. When parents receive the care they need, ideally in the same health system, the entire family benefits.
- Wisconsin has significant racial disparities in access to insurance coverage and health outcomes. BadgerCare expansion will likely have a positive impact on coverage for communities of color who face these challenges.



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- A recent Behavioral Health Gaps Analysis in Wisconsin indicated that the most common barrier to access to care was lack of financial coverage. For many individuals near the income cut off for BadgerCare, high deductibles for the Affordable Care Act can be a significant barrier to seeking necessary care.

Secondary benefits:

- Although the Legislature has supported some increases in BadgerCare rates, Wisconsin still lags neighboring states. The additional Federal dollars could improve rates for local clinics and health systems and help them prioritize behavioral health.
- An ongoing challenge for local hospitals is uncompensated care. In rural areas, health systems are major employers. Increasing coverage would reduce this burden and support critical access. Due to the structure of the Affordable Care Act, BadgerCare expansion would also directly increase federal funding for hospitals.
- Many individuals incarcerated in County jails and families whose children enter County Child Welfare services are affected by substance abuse and mental health challenges. Many do not have ready access to care. There is a correlation among states that provide greater access to care and reduced burden on these County services and property taxes. In the last legislative session, the Wisconsin Counties Association supported Assembly Bill 255 that included BadgerCare expansion.
- Similarly, for many individuals whose mental health and substance abuse challenges contribute to entering the State Criminal Justice system, access to treatment supports their recovery and can reduce the high costs of incarceration.
- Bipartisan collaboration for the benefit of Wisconsin citizens would be reflected by joining the nearly 40 states, including more than a dozen with fiscally conservative leadership, that have recognized the health and economic benefits of this opportunity.

BadgerCare expansion in Wisconsin would be a critical step in addressing Wisconsin's challenges of access to mental health services, overdose deaths and suicide. It addresses the difficulty for adults between 100 - 138% of the FPL whose income limits access to coverage. It is important to state that for families whose children rely on BadgerCare with family incomes above 138%, more needs to be done however, BadgerCare Expansion would be a **great step**.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our recommendation, your service to Wisconsin citizens and your efforts to move Wisconsin forward!