



NEWSLETTER

March 2021 Edition

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Welcome to the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH) April Newsletter!

Responding to COVID Changes at School – Focus of April Fact Sheet

For children already struggling with a mental health or family issue, the COVID-19 pandemic is and has been especially challenging. Children with special education needs, low income, and children in rural areas are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and require additional support upon return to in-person learning. The [April OCMH Fact Sheet](#) explores return to school issues.

- Some students returning to in-person learning may be anxious about getting back into a routine and about what to expect in an altered classroom environment.
- Extra support to ensure positive emotional well-being for all students will be critical for successful school outcomes.
- Children in rural areas, low-income families, Hispanic families, and children with special needs have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- All children already struggling with a mental health or family-related issue are also finding the pandemic especially challenging.
- College students are reporting increased depressive symptoms which are negatively affecting their academic performance.
- Wisconsin is one of the top five states for having the most insurance claims submitted for intentional self-harm injuries during the pandemic.



The Fact Sheet offers things we can do:

- Parents can talk to their children about what to expect as they return to school. For tips on having that discussion watch this short video – the [3 Ps of Parenting during the Pandemic](#).
- Parents who think their child may need mental health treatment but don't know where to start can view our OCMH [guide on how to access children's mental health services](#).
- Schools can foster a sense of belonging and create space, especially for students of color and those with special needs, to reflect on the effects of the pandemic.
- Policymakers can support expansion of school mental health funding for school psychologists, counselors, and nurses and an increase in funding for school mental health collaboration grants to assist schools in connecting students to mental health services. In addition, increase the Earned Income Tax Credit which has been demonstrated to reduce children's behavioral health challenges.

There are a number of items in the proposed state budget that relate to this topic:

- **Increase investment in school mental health** both student services staff and mental health collaboration grants (DPI, p.11).
- **Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit** to reduce children's behavioral health problems, including anxiety and depression, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (General Fund Taxes, p. 25).
- **Expand Medicaid** which would extend coverage to 53,000 parents and result in millions of dollars of savings that could be reinvesting in children's mental health (DHS, p. 10).

Note: Page numbers are from the [Legislative Fiscal Bureau Summary of Governor's Budget Recommendations](#).

Lived Experience Insights

OCMH Lived Experience Partners share their insights on the changes COVID-19 has on schools.

How has the pandemic impacted what schooling looks like for your family?

One of the unintended consequences of COVID for our family was the realization of how much our son, Jacob, was struggling to keep it all together during school and the impact of school on his mental health. During the initial school shut down and throughout the summer, his mood went from angry and withdrawn to smiling again. It was as if a weight was lifted off his shoulders. When our school district offered virtual or in person school for the fall of 2020, we chose virtual. That was not without tradeoffs. Being diagnosed with ADHD, Autism, Depressive Mood and Anxiety, it was difficult for him to follow the online format as each class was different and used many different platforms. Jacob's mood continued to improve, however the struggle to keep his grades up was too much, despite the assistance of his teachers. It was decided that Jacob would return to school on an amended schedule so that he could build confidence and work towards alleviating some of the stressors school caused.

LIVED EXPERIENCE PARTNERS
BUILD CONNECTIONS AND CAPACITY
TO CREATE SYSTEMS CHANGE



What strategies, approaches, or resources have helped you with your child's schooling during COVID?
Having a child who has needs that require a little extra attention is not easy. We struggled to find the right combination of outside professionals while balancing our jobs and family. Fortunately, after many years of struggle it is beginning to come together. Reaching out to other organizations, like the Regional Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, Autism Society, Family Ties, FACETS, and CHADD have been helpful, especially when it came to being able to advocate for our son and connecting with other parents who have gone through similar things. I reached out to Parent to Parent for a peer match. This was invaluable to me. When you have a child who is struggling at school with behaviors, stemming from mental health issues, friends and family do not always understand. It was so helpful to talk with someone who understands what it takes and how exhausting it can be to advocate for and worry about your child.

What action would you like to see taken by policymakers, communities, or schools to respond to COVID changes in school?

There are many families who don't have the understanding, time, effort, and resources it takes to help their own child with their mental health needs. We need to build communities that offer support, not judgement, to make it easier for families to get access to and navigate these complex systems. Without

critical resources, children fall through the cracks. Health care disparities, benefits for working families, lack of qualified professionals who work with children all add to the crisis in our communities.

The education system is often stacked against parents when their child is struggling and this is heart wrenching. In our schools, teachers struggle as well. They want to do the best they can for their students, but they, like families, struggle with lack of needed resources, training, and large class sizes, especially when behaviors they don't quite understand creep in. Schools are often underfunded and overpopulated so it's no wonder why these inequalities exist. Legislation needs to properly fund schools, especially our mental health and special education programs to ensure schools have the resources and expertise they need to support all struggling students.

From Tracey Stanislaski, Office of Children's Mental Health Lived Experience Partner from Waukesha County

Mental Health 101 – Collective Impact Partner experts help us understand basics of mental health

Welcome to this new addition to our newsletter

What is Mental Health?

By: Kristin Kroll, PhD, Assistant Professor, Pediatric Psychologist – Medical College of Wisconsin

The term “mental health” refers to the impact of an individual’s cognitive, behavioral, and emotional functioning upon their overall well-being. If we look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, mental health is reliant upon our basic physiological needs, including safety, being met. When these needs are not met due to financial concerns, adverse childhood events, or other factors, poor mental health can result. Similarly, mental health can be impacted by a genetic vulnerability to certain disorders, life events, and the degree to which an individual’s higher needs of belonging and interconnectedness, self-esteem, and self-actualization are experienced. If these concerns arise, the field of mental health can provide evidence-based treatments to help improve an individual’s mental health by improving emotional health, cognitive functioning, behavior, and most importantly, their overall well-being.



Children's Mental Health Awareness

Please join us in celebrating Children's Mental Health

Children's Mental Health (CMH) Awareness week is the first week of May (May 2 – 8, 2021), and CMH Awareness Day is Thursday, May 6, 2021. Mental health looks different for everyone. Listen to Wisconsin youth as they share their connection to mental health through art and story. Join us for the following Facebook Live Events:

Wisconsin Youth Virtual Art Gallery

- Middle and high school students are encouraged to share their original art to be featured in the Wisconsin Youth Virtual Art Gallery. All mediums of visual or performing arts are accepted. To enter complete the [submission form](#) by April 25, 2021.
- Support youth artists at the Facebook Live Event on Tuesday, May 4th from 6 – 7:30 pm. Go to the [OCMH Facebook page](#) at the time of the event to join.

Teen Mental Health Virtual Panel

Four Wisconsin teens will share what mental health looks like for them and what gives them hope. Join the discussion on Thursday, May 6th from 6 – 7:15 pm. Go to the [OCMH Facebook page](#) at the time of the event to join.

Learn more at <https://www.facebook.com/OCMHWI/> or on the [OCMH website](#).

OCMH Updates

OCMH to Participate in National Governors Association Grant on Social and Emotional Needs of Kids and Families

Wisconsin is one of six states selected to work with the National Governors Association (NGA) on strategies for equitably meeting the social-emotional needs of students and families during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Tony Evers and First Lady Kathy Evers made the announcement last week.

Accompanying support from NGA will be a \$35,000 grant that will fund a series of focus groups around parent and family engagement to help increase the mental, social, and emotional well-being of kids and families. Working with the First Lady's office and OCMH in the grant preparation was the Department of Public Instruction Student Services and the UW's Wisconsin Institute of Public Policy and Service Research Partners.

Parents with Child Welfare Experience Continue Conversation with OCMH

Beginning in January 2021 parents with child welfare experience have been meeting monthly to lend their voices to help improve Wisconsin's child welfare system. Participating parents represent all regions of the state and have a variety of experiences within the child welfare system. Conversations have been insightful, emotional, and powerful. So far, parents have shared the following insights:

- Parents need more information to support their understanding of the Child Protective Services (CPS) process.
- Parents need more support both during and after their CPS involvement.
- Parents need to know and understand their rights, responsibilities, and expectations.

The group will continue to meet monthly to dive deeper in to these topics and further explore ways to help parents and families be more successful.

Mental Health Crisis Card

OCMH and Attorney General Josh Kaul issued a joint [press release](#) announcing the Mental Health Crisis Card as a valuable tool to help kids in mental health crisis on April 7, 2021. The wallet-sized card tells people who are with a youth experiencing an agitated state or mental health crisis what to do immediately, in the first five minutes, to de-escalate the situation. Youth fill out their own card and list up to three calming strategies on the front of the card. When needed, youth can show the card to people around them who can follow their calming instructions.



"These cards will help children in crisis get the support they need quickly," said Attorney General Kaul. "Wisconsin DOJ's Office of School Safety is proud to be partnering with the Office of Children's Mental Health on this important resource."

Youth know what calms them better than anyone else and listening to their voice is important. When people follow calming strategies a young person has identified, negative impacts can be reduced or eliminated. The crisis situation can be avoided and youth will feel safe and understood.

Among the resources listed on the back of the Card is SPEAK UP, SPEAK OUT – a free, 24/7 digital resource center and tip line created by the Wisconsin Department of Justice Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of School Safety (OSS). Students, parents, school staff, or any community members can submit a school safety concern or threat via the [resource center website](#), mobile phone application, or toll-free number. Resource center staff work around-the-clock to respond to tips and to deploy a response locally by communicating directly with school administrators, law enforcement, and counselors.

The card was developed by the OCMH Access Team in response to those with lived experience describing incidents where the youth experiencing an agitated state ended up escalating into a full mental health crisis and/or being restrained. The team created the card to introduce calming strategies for a responder to use in order to de-escalate the situation. [For information. Print the Card.](#)

Legislative & Policy Update

State Biennial Budget now before the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee

As our March update noted, Governor Evers' 2021-23 state budget proposal, with its focus on the well-being of Wisconsin residents, offers much to reduce economic stress on families and improve the mental health of our children. The list that follows includes items in Governor Evers' budget that specifically address children's mental health.

- **School Mental Health / Student Wellness.** Invest more than \$46.5 million over the biennium in students' mental health to fund 10% of school expenditures for school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses.
- **School Mental Health Collaboration Grants.** Increase funding by \$7.0 million GPR to increase the number and size of school-based mental health collaboration grants that provide students with mental health services, specifically through co-location of services at schools.
- **Medicaid Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Child -Adolescent Day Treatment Rate Increases.** Increase the Medicaid rate for outpatient mental health and substance abuse services and child-adolescent day treatment to increase access to suicide treatment and prevention services.
- **Mental and Behavioral Health Support (for College Students).** Support additional and improved student health services related to mental and behavioral health.
- **Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Training and Technical Assistance for Early Childhood Educators.** As part of the Quality Care for Quality Kids allocation, provide funding for training and technical assistance to child care educators with the goal of reducing instances of children being removed from care settings due to behavioral challenges. This funding for training, technical assistance, and program coordination will be augmented by dollars from DCF's implementation [Preschool Development Grant – Birth to Five](#) (DCF, \$3,000,000 TANF, p. 11).
- **Out-of-school Time Grants.** Create new out-of-school time grants to address unmet community needs for high quality programming in underserved communities.
- **Behavioral Health Treatment for Deaf.** Establish a behavioral health treatment program for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind to offer direct treatment from a provider fluent in American Sign Language and educated on the culturally unique challenges faced by these individuals.

- **Child Psychiatry Consultation Program.** Expand this program, which provides psychiatry consultation services to providers caring for pediatric patients with mental health needs, statewide.
- **Behavioral Health Bed Tracker.** Fund a real-time crisis stabilization, peer response and inpatient psychiatric bed tracking system that is accessible to all entities involved in identifying placement options for individuals in crisis to improve crisis diversion efforts.

JFC decided to hold public hearings on the budget from April 6 to April 22. On April 6, the Finance Committee heard from four state departments, including the Department of Public Instruction. However, no other state departments have been invited to speak to their budgets. Typically, the Committee invites Secretaries from DHS, DCF, DOC, and other large departments to review the highlights of their budgets and to answer Committee members' questions. April 21 in Rhinelander and April 22 in Menomonie are the remaining, announced public hearings.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Our Collective Impact Infant/Toddler Team has been working steadfastly for several years to increase access to mental health consultation for infant and early childhood mental health. Mental health consultation allows child and family serving professionals to receive guidance, resources, and expert advice from certified mental health specialists to address the behavioral and emotional challenges of infants and young children. Since the funding to expand this program statewide was not included in the Governor's budget proposal, our network partners are contacting Joint Finance Committee members to advocate for its addition to the state budget. With an investment of \$5.3 million (about \$2 million/year), by the end of the 2021-23 biennium a total of 34 consultants would be available to provide mental health consultation which is the number of consultants estimated necessary to meet statewide requests for assistance. For more information on the proposal, sample emails and draft editorial letters, please see the communication kit that is [online](#).

Assembly Mental Health Committee Considers Legislation Suggestions

On March 24th, Director Hall was invited to testify before the Assembly Mental Health Committee. Hall presented data on the status of children's mental health and well-being in Wisconsin. Also, at the Committee's request, she made recommendations on how to improve children's well-being and the children's mental health system. The recommendations are posted on the OCMH website as follows:

- [Presentation](#)
- [Testimony](#)
- [Recommendations](#)

Qualified Residential Treatment Programs – Treatment for Children under Families First

The federal Families First law requires that when children are placed in a residential care center for children and youth, group home, or shelter care facility, the facility must operate a qualified residential treatment program (QRTP) for the state to receive federal funds that help pay for treatment. AB 143 / SB 161 set out the certification qualifications for QRTPs. Under the bill, if a child is placed in a certified QRTP, the agency must assemble a family permanency team to participate in permanency planning for the child, and invite appropriate biological family members, relatives, like-kin, and professionals who serve as a resource for the family to participate. The bill requires the agency to include in the permanency plan information about the family permanency team and its recommendations. The bill passed the Assembly Committee on Children and Families on March 31st.

Biden-Harris Administration Announces Actions to Address the Gun Violence Public Health Epidemic

In response to recent mass shootings, the Biden-Harris Administration announced six initial actions to address the gun violence public health epidemic. In upcoming weeks, the Administration will: 1) issue a proposed rule on "ghost guns," 2) issue a proposed rule on stabilizing braces that effectively turn pistols

into a short-barreled rifles, 3) publish model “red flag” legislation for states to adopt (Red flag laws allow family members or law enforcement to petition for a court order temporarily barring people in crisis from accessing firearms if they present a danger to themselves or others.), 4) invest in evidence-based community violence interventions, 5) issue an annual report on firearms trafficking, and 6) nominate David Chipman to serve as Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. [More.](#)

Keeping All Students Safe Act

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul along with 16 additional attorneys general has urged Congress to enact the Keeping All Students Safe Act (KASSA) to ban isolated confinement and life-threatening restraint practices in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools. Their March 21st letter asked Congress to eliminate these detrimental disciplinary tactics which endanger the physical and psychological well-being of our nation’s children.

Children’s Mental Health in Professional Literature

*OCMH Senior
Research Analyst
Melissa Murphy
spotlights new, open
access articles about
children’s mental
health.*



Children’s Mental Health Emergency Department Visits: 2007–2016. [Read the article.](#)

Evaluation of a Web-Based Training Model for Family Peer Advocates in Children’s Mental Health. [Read the article.](#)

How do economic downturns affect the mental health of children? Evidence from the National Health Interview Survey. [Read the article.](#)

Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents. [Read the article.](#)

More articles are available on the [OCMH Website](#).

Of Interest

April is National Minority Health Month

Held each April, this national health observance raises awareness around the health disparities that exist for every racial and ethnic minority community. This year the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health is focusing on the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on racial and ethnic minority and American Indian and Alaska Native communities and the need for these vulnerable communities to get vaccinated. [More information.](#)

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance in Wisconsin. Alcohol Awareness Month provides an opportunity to highlight how alcohol use impacts the health and safety of individuals and communities. [Learn more.](#) Read OCMH’s [Fact Sheet on Preventing Underage Drinking](#).

April is Autism Acceptance Month

The Autism Society of America’s theme for Autism Acceptance Month 2021 is “Celebrate Differences.” Designed to build a better awareness of the signs, symptoms, and realities of autism, #CelebrateDifferences focuses on providing information and resources for communities to be more aware of autism, promote acceptance, and be more inclusive in everyday life. [For information.](#)

April is National Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month

The Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board recognizes April as National Child Abuse Prevention Month by promoting and strengthening child abuse prevention efforts in Wisconsin. Visit their [website](#) for a public awareness toolkit and information on Five for Families, a statewide public awareness campaign developed as a universal prevention strategy.

Prevent Suicide Conference

The 11th Annual Prevent Suicide Wisconsin Conference is April 29 – 30, 2021 and is online via Zoom. This year's conference theme is Expanding the Conversation with topics of peer support, the intersection of mental health and race, social justice frameworks for suicide prevention, and centering lived experience. [For information and registration](#). Poster submissions are being accepted until April 15, 2021. [For information](#).

Competition for the School-based Mental Health Services Grant

The Department of Public Instruction announces the 2021-23 Competition for the School-based Mental Health Services Grant (SBMH). The grant program is designed to support public school districts, independent charter schools and consortium of these, in collaborating with community mental health providers to develop and implement comprehensive school-based mental health programs and practices. These are two year grants (2021-2023). Applicants may request an amount between \$10,000 and \$75,000 and grantees will receive that amount in each of the two years. Applications submitted will be for the first year of the project only. For the 2021-23 SBMH grant cycle, DPI is using the WizeHive online platform. All grants submitted by 11:59 p.m. on May 3, 2021, will be reviewed. The application online portal link, guidelines, scoring rubric, and a PDF copy of the application (for reference only) can be found at the SBMH grant webpage <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/school-based-grant-program>.

Week of the Young Child (WOYC)

April 10 – 16, 2021 is the Week of the Young Child, a fun-filled week celebrating early learning, young children, their teachers, families, and communities. 2021 is the 50th anniversary of WOYC. #WOYC21. [For information](#).

Children's Mental Health in Wisconsin News

Here are a few articles related to children's mental health that we noted and would like to share.

PBS Wisconsin video and script of an interview with the Director of Outpatient at Milwaukee Behavioral Health Division discussing the status of mental health during COVID-19. Access/watch the [video/transcript](#).

The pandemic masks ongoing child abuse crisis as cases plummet. [Read the article](#). Wisconsin sees 25 percent drop in reports of child abuse during pandemic. [Review the story](#).

(Governor) Evers meets with New London teens to discuss mental health during pandemic. [Read the article](#).

The Office of Children's Mental Health

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